Campione! Volume 14

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These are novel illustrations that were included in "Campione! Volume 14".

八人目の神殺し

カンピオーネ！ Campione XIV

丈月城
Illustration シコルスキー

た 9-14

カンピオーネ！ XIV 八人目の神殺し

丈月城

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草薙護堂は神殺しである。

剣の王・ドニが魔術結社を招集して催した神獣狩りに護堂（ごどう）を招待する。イタリアで再会した二人の神殺し（カンピオーネ）に魔術師たちは騒動の予感を覚える。不審な行動を取るドニを追った先で、謎の洞穴に吸い込まれた護堂、エリカ、恵那（えな）の三人はどことも知れぬ場所をさまようことになってしまう。さらに、その地で護堂は新たな神殺しと邂逅（かいこう）する…!!

丈月 城

Illustration
シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

八人目の神殺し

Campione XIV

ウルディン

アイーシャ

護堂

恵那

祐理

エリカ

「――――!?」

護堂はあわてて振り返った。

そこにはエリカと恵那がいた。

しかも、ふたりともバスタオル代わりの白い布で前を隠しただけで――

ほかには薄布一枚もまとっていない。

裸、なのである。

「おおお、おまえたち、一体どうしてここに……!?」

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丈月 城
Illustration
シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！
八人目の神殺し
Campione XIV

Chapter 1 - Tuscan Prelude

Part 1

A hectic journey running all over the place—

That was how one could summarize Kusanagi Godou's expedition to Italy's Tuscany.

Basically, Godou had battled the divine beast at the end of his journey although his memories of this segment were rather vague. Conversely, the matter of "traveling to so many places in such a short time" left a far greater impression on him.

Not long after Kusanagi Godou became a godslayer...

Shortly after he dueled his kin, Salvatore Doni, by the shore of Lake Garda in northern Italy...

On that very morning, after parting ways with Doni, Godou was confronted with Erica's invitation.

'Hey Godou, let's go slay a divine beast after we reach Milan, how's that?'

Godou began a journey in order to decline this invitation.

More accurately, he fled. His destination was northern Italy's ancient city of Verona, the stage where the story of Romeo and Juliet was set.

This town not only neighbored Lake Garda but also possessed an international airport.

As soon as he entered Verona, Godou dashed his way straight towards the airport.

An ancient city with a long history, Verona was the site of the Roman amphitheater, the Verona Arena, which remained in use for activities even in the modern day. The city also had deep connections to the great writer Dante. Furthermore, there were many astounding churches, cathedrals and other architecture.

Despite being a town where one could hardly resist a quick sightseeing tour, Godou resolutely rejected temptation.

Were he to stop here, he would surely be caught by Erica.

Then with his personal freewill completely ignored, he would be forced to accept this amazingly attractive girl as his lifelong partner—

Come to think of it, that would certainly be a sweet and blissful future.

Nevertheless, it was only natural for a student to have doubts over committing his future by the May of his first year in high school. Without even listening to the details of the "divine beast slaying," Godou went directly to the airport. This was an instantaneous act he undertook just as he was about to be devoured by Erica's overwhelming charm.

In any case, after escaping fortuitously, Godou finally managed to board the last flight scheduled that morning.

However, he still could not let down his guard before the plane took off, in case Erica tried to prevent him from leaving the country.

Nevertheless, Godou's plane managed to take flight without incident, lifting off successfully.

"All that worrying for nothing..."

Seated on the plane, Godou muttered to himself.

With this, that Erica girl would probably have no choice but to give up. What an absurd itinerary. To go slay an unidentified monster the next day after fighting the Campione who stood as Europe's strongest swordsman? That would have been way too much no matter what.

Besides, Kusanagi Godou was a pacifist. He would rather keep a respectful distance away from such meaningless combat...

While Godou was contemplating these affairs, the plane reached Switzerland's Zurich Airport. He would then take a transfer flight to Tokyo from here.

Since there were three hours until his next flight took off, he had to find a way to kill time.

Hence, Godou ordered a coffee at a cafe in front of a duty free shop. A long-missed moment of peace—

Then Godou was greeted with a sudden reunion.

"Oh dear, to think I would run into you in a place like this, Godou. What wonderful serendipity!"

Approaching this way, Erica deliberately emphasized the element of luck in her exclamation.

The smile appearing on her lips was like the devil's through and through.

"Hoho. Surely this must be the gods rewarding me for my many benevolent deeds."

"Hold it right there, Erica. This feels as though you took the same flight as me. If that were not the case, your presence here cannot be explained."

Certain imaginings surfaced turbulently in Godou's mind.

Such as a passenger poisoned for the sake of obtaining a seat on the fully booked flight, followed by a scene of a blonde beauty nonchalantly sitting down on a vacated seat.

These were delusions. Nevertheless, Erica was perfectly capable of doing that.

"I didn't do anything illegal or immoral, okay? I asked an old acquaintance for a favor and borrowed a private jet, that's all."

"I-I see."

Godou was relieved to hear this unexpected answer.

However, Erica put on a smile with deliberate affectation.

"Be that as it may, should you happen to continue ignoring my myriad entreaties, Godou, the flight to Tokyo might very well run into some trouble. The pilot might suddenly feel unwell, for example."

"!?"

"Should that be the case, Godou, you'll be trapped here. Oh dear , so many people will be inconvenienced."

"Are you threatening me!?"

"Of course not. I would consider this a lover's willful request."

Sitting down beside Godou, Erica suddenly leaned over.

Godou could feel her astoundingly attractive body tightly against him. Separated only by the reddish blonde hair, her face also pressed close. Godou could even smell the fragrance of her perfume.

Faced with this helpless and lamentable situation, Godou could feel himself unsettled greatly. His heart was pounding like mad.

For a high school boy whose age equaled the number of years without a girlfriend, this was the absolute unbearable limit.

"Moreover, I am actually quite willful, you know? How could you leave your lover behind without a single hug or farewell..."

"....."

"For someone like me who is merely using radical measures to hold back her beloved, impatient for their next reunion, I'm certain the sympathy of most Italians would side with me, wouldn't you agree?"

"B-But the fact is, you're calling us lovers on your own accord."

"True, when clearly our relationship has reached the point where we have brought our lips madly together in the past, and even shared beds for the night?"

"B-But that was necessary for fighting gods and that idiot Doni."

Godou knew it. The awareness of sharing "no ordinary relations " with Erica still lurked somewhere in the back of his mind.

Consequently, the resolution behind his objections was compromised.

Furthermore, his inability to push away the passionate body she was leaning tightly against him stemmed purely from a difference in arm strength.

Using mysterious magic to strengthen herself, Erica was able to command monstrous strength even beyond that of heavyweight wrestlers.

"Then there is the latest news I obtained merely by chance."

Hearing Erica's low whispers in his ear, Godou's body stiffened even more. His cheeks felt hot.

But after listening to the news she recounted, he immediately tensed his expression.

"An eel-like monster surfacing in Tuscany... Previously, it was only sighted in the depths of mountainous forests, but last night, it made an appearance at the ruins of a medieval fort and apparently went on a rampage."

"Did it attack humans!?"

"No issue there for now, for it's a desolate site akin to historical ruins. However, there are towns nearby so it does pose a risk."

"This is not as simple as a mere ordinary giant beast..."

A divine beast. A type of creature similar to the [Boar] summoned by Verethragna's authority. Godou was completely surprised to learn that a creature resembling an UMA could live quietly, making its residence deep in the mountain woods.

"Since Doni lives near there, I'd rather have him handle it."

"You're not wrong on that point, no doubt about it. But do realize that it could develop into a serious situation. If you really leave it to him, Sir Salvatore's existence itself is a great source of trouble."

"That's totally ridiculous. You mean he's a double-edged sword, huh..."

Rather than taking care of problems, Salvatore Doni was clearly more adept at causing them.

Realizing what Erica meant, Godou nodded.

"Currently, the magic associations of Florence intend to handle the situation. However, if this monster really is a divine beast-class creature... They cannot be allowed to shoulder the responsibility. They are incapable of shouldering it..."

Erica was currently sitting on Godou's lap quietly. While feeling the sensations of her weight and body temperature, Godou recovered his calm.

"The only ones capable of facing off against the gods and their possessions are the Campiones. Namely, only you and your kin, Kusanagi Godou, understood?"

Faced with this notification which sounded like a challenge to his magnanimity, Godou had no choice but to accept his fate.

Kusanagi Godou was a pacifist. One who kept a respectful distance from pointless combat. But at the same time, he was also a man with a greater sense of responsibility and aspirations to serve the public good than ordinary people.

Thus, Godou's third emergency trip to Italy was decided.

The flight from Zurich to Milan was roughly one hour long.

Part 2

"Worse comes to worst, should our opponent really turn out to be a divine beast, we have two options available. Either we put our lives on the line in an attempt to slay the enemy or put our lives on the line to stall for time."

These words were spoken by Clarens, Erica's colleague. Sporting a shaved head, he was a Dutchman of African descent.

"Let me clarify beforehand. These options are only available provided we form a hit squad consisting only of multiple Great Knight-class magi like us. Unless this condition is fulfilled, evacuating and praying to God would be the only course of action. "

"In short, our enemy is totally absurd."

The current location was a lounge in the headquarters of Milan's [Copper Black Cross], reserved for members of the core leadership.

The room exuded an air of luxury. Not only were there everyday furnishings such as couches but it was even equipped with a private bar and a billiards table. This was where Godou currently faced three other people.

Since Erica had gone off to another room to get changed, all the people present were male.

One of them began to discuss the challenge of fighting divine beasts.

"Yeah. Furthermore, the Campione is precisely the transcendent existence that this kind of divine beast cannot hold a candle to."

"Isn't the description, 'transcendent existence,' a bit too exaggerated..."

"Oh no, it's only because you've repeatedly engaged in absurd battles of that sort, your senses are getting warped."

This time, the speaker was Gennaro Gantz.

Despite his short stature, he was quite a brawny young man. With a head of black hair and a bearded face reminiscent of a pirate's, he looked like he was in his latter thirties. In actual fact, he was only twenty-odd years old. He carried an unrefined air about him.

"Disregarding the various Campiones who stand as kings, the only person belonging to the human realm and capable of soloing a divine beast is probably Paolo. Even so, it would still be a great battle where one must be prepared to accept the possibility of death."

Paolo—Paolo Blandelli. Godou had heard that he was Erica's paternal uncle and legal guardian.

Godou turned his gaze towards the third person present whose name was just mentioned. The man was smiling wryly.

"Allow me to object to the accuracy of that statement. Aside from me, there are plenty of others who have reached that level of power."

"But purely in regards to expertise in combat against divine beasts, you are considered the indisputable master, right?"

"That's only because I've grown accustomed to it. Due to some personal ties to one of your kin, the Campiones, I ended up encountering divine beasts relatively often."

While speaking, Paolo turned to face Godou halfway through.

Godou was surprised by the gaze of Paolo's clear eyes of blue. After the flight from Zurich landed at Milan's Marpensa Airport, Godou had arrived at the [Copper Black Cross] headquarters half an hour earlier.

This was his first time meeting Erica's dear uncle.

As expected of a man whose niece was such a beauty, his face was quite handsome too.

His stately demeanor was coupled with a refined manner of speech. Long hair draped gently over his shoulders while a bit of stubble had gathered about his mouth. In addition, he was quite strongly built.

Even dressed casually in a long-sleeved t-shirt with a parka, his muscular body, steeled through and through, was quite conspicuous.

But more than his appearance, it was Paolo's comportment that held Godou's gaze of fascination.

Paolo was very dignified. Despite his slightly rough appearance and casual attire, nothing could detract from his inborn sense of dignity. Rather, it helped to serve as a foil for contrast.

Gallant, intellectual, handsome, noble—

Until Paolo, Godou had never met anyone who embodied the " knight" concept so thoroughly.

"Please, everyone, there's no need to show excessive respect to someone like me. Not to mention, I'm also the youngest person here. Please converse with me normally."

The three men present were different from Salvatore Doni.

Feeling particularly uncomfortable about the privileged treatment he was receiving from Paolo, Godou suggested. For the high school student who was the youngest present, this type of worry was only natural. As a result, Gantz suddenly straightened his back.

"Eh, is it really okay? That would be absolutely splendid. I'm really glad to know that the seventh Campione is someone easy to get along with, oh my."

"Gennaro, even if His Majesty makes a personal request, please do pay a little attention to your behavior."

On the other hand, Clarens frowned in response to his colleague's reaction.

"Thank you for your considerate offer, Your Majesty. Respect for the various Devil Kings is the requisite attitude displayed by those involved in the realm of magic. Rather, a candid chat would present difficulties. However."

After deliberately offering this respectful explanation, the bald black man finally smiled.

"By a stroke of good fortune, I, Clarens, am not so lacking in the talent of adaptability as to be unable to accommodate your request . Indeed, I shall bear your request in mind henceforth. Let us get along well together."

Saying that, he elegantly bowed his head as he remained seated on the couch.

Godou could only smile awkwardly in response to Clarens' rigorous style of speech and elegant mannerisms.

An exchange as befitted Erica's colleagues, that was Godou's heartfelt impression.

Smiling wryly at the sight of his subordinates' reactions, Paolo responded in the following manner:

"Kusanagi Godou, you are a king. It is only natural for us to take utmost pains to respect your wishes as much as possible. It is also a king's duty to accept the respect we offer as knights.

Nevertheless, your intentions of practicality are greatly appreciated."

"R-Respect?"

"What we offer to all Campiones is the greatest reverence and awe. No matter what temperament they may display, they are the ones with experience, great achievements worthy of the godslayer title."

Paolo continued to gaze straight into Godou's eyes as he spoke.

Drawn by the sincerity and power in Paolo's gaze, Godou nodded involuntarily.

"Furthermore, even disregarding the respect offered to all Devil Kings, from a personal standpoint, I would still provide Kusanagi Godou with maximum support. This goes for Europe without saying, but also extends to anywhere around the world."

"Eh!?"

Paolo smiled gallantly in response to Godou's shocked reaction to the unexpected declaration.

"There are multiple reasons for this. First of all, I have heard reports of your character, a splendid youth just as I expected. Additionally, there is the matter of gratitude. Without Kusanagi Godou, my niece could not have returned to Milan, safe and sound ."

"No really, all I've done is receive Erica's help."

Ever since their encounter on the island of Sardinia, Godou and Erica had been supporting each other. Moreover, Erica probably did the lion's share of helping.

Considering the issue of gratitude, Godou felt that he was the one who should be returning favors.

But seeing Godou shake his head, Paolo suddenly seemed to be at a loss for words.

After a brief moment of hesitation, he coughed dryly. Then he spoke rather slowly.

"In that case, let me add another reason. Well, basically... In the place of Erica's deceased parents, I believe I am bound by duty to provide the best for this daughter's partner. As the uncle who acts as her custodian."

"P-Partner—"

Come to think it, on further examination, this current situation could very well constitute Godou's visit to the parental home of the girl with whom he shared "no ordinary relations."

Isn't this basically meeting the parents...?

"Consequently, whether stemming from official or personal reasons, I am bound by duty to pledge my support. Goodness knows if this is a mixed blessing or not, but you are surely unprecedented in regards to placating the stubborn surrogate father that I am."

By suddenly addressing Godou with the patronizing *kimi* form of saying "you" in Japanese, Paolo's mixed feelings were readily apparent.

However, Godou naturally had no objections. Instead, he was quite impressed with this forthright awkwardness coming from a man unaccustomed to his surrogate paternal role.

"Indeed, she is a girl who is sometimes too smart for her own good. Currently, I am sincerely grateful and relieved that her chosen partner is a shrewd and able man on her level instead of a free spirit like Sir Salvatore."

"It really helps to hear that coming from you."

Gazing at each other for a moment, Godou and Paolo Blandelli then smiled wryly simultaneously.

Unlike his cunning niece, Erica's uncle seemed to be an upfront man of common sense.

Watching Godou and Paolo, Gantz remarked emphatically.

"That said, you're quite a 'decent' person despite being the seventh Campione. Could this be an omen of cataclysmic change? I never would have expected the birth of a sensible Devil King."

"Pay attention to what you're saying, Gennaro."

Paolo spoke as if reprimanding his subordinate.

"No matter how sensible or benevolent, a Campione cannot possibly be a harmless existence. I can predict with certainty that Kusanagi Godou will become a world-shaking Devil King in the future."

"P-Paolo-san?"

"My apologies. Based on the reports so far, although I've garnered that you have no such intentions... But inevitably, you will undoubtedly become 'that type of existence.' Regrettably, I am a man who has dealt much with the various Campiones. This experience informs me."

"I see."

At that moment, Godou could only think to himself that " Paolo-san sure loves to worry" and did not try to object.

It was only months later, after encountering a number of his kin and reflecting on his own atrocities, when Godou was struck deeply by how prophetic Paolo's words were.

Seeing Godou reserve his judgment for now, Paolo remarked with heartfelt intensity.

"By the way, I never would have expected Erica to set her sights on the seventh Campione..."

"Oh dear, that's certainly true. I could not have foreseen that our lady would..."

"That female fox huh..."

Staring into the distance, Clarens and Gantz were also overcome with emotion.

They apparently regarded Erica as something of an unbridled horse—Just as Godou racked his brain for a response...

"Hello everyone, did something happen? You're all bearing rather eccentric expressions. It's a little unusual."

Accompanied by the sound of the door opening, Erica entered.

The male magi immediately resumed their usual countenance and straightened their sitting posture. Clarens answered on their behalf with an innocent look:

"Nothing at all. Anyway, are you ready to set off, my lady?"

"Yes. I also intend to visit Florence for gathering intelligence."

Erica had changed into a red jacket and black jeans, a simple coordination of rossonero colors. Pulling a trolley case behind her, she looked completely like she was about to go traveling.

Before setting off for Tuscany, Godou and Erica were simply making a quick visit to the [Copper Black Cross] headquarters.

Next came the real journey. The pair's subsequent destination was the ancient city of Florence. The Arno was the major river in the Tuscany region flowing through this city.

The eel-like monster was located in the mountainous region near the Arno's source.

Part 3

"This comes as quite a surprise. I can't believe you'd want to take something like a train."

Seeing his companion looking a little bored, Godou struck up conversation.

This was taking place in the spacious first class compartment on the express train which had just departed from the Milan station.

On the other hand, this daughter of the Blandelli family, currently sitting beside Godou, had once asserted in no uncertain terms that "I shouldn't need to take buses or trains, okay?"

"Well, this supposedly reaches Florence faster than traveling by car or by plane. Considering the way you are, you'd probably accept Gennaro's offer of 'let me take you there by car' or the like."

Erica replied with an expression of annoyance.

"And would there be anything wrong with that?"

"Of course there would. Precisely because of him. He'd probably use the opportunity to play Japanese children's cartoons nonstop in the car. Trying to show them off to you."

"C-Cartoons?"

"I definitely have no wish of partaking in anything like that."

Godou recalled the terrifying face of Gennaro Gantz.

That manly, bearded face. If a bandana was wrapped over his head, he would immediately become a fearsome pirate. It was impossible to associate that face with anime. Nevertheless, Godou did not get the impression that Erica was lying...

"People have all sorts of hobbies."

Godou simply responded with a brief comment. While they were talking, the train really started to get going.

Mineral water, coffee, wine, champagne and other drinks were offered in the first class car. There were also various snacks and fast food.

However, Erica slowly opened a basket she had brought herself.

"What is that?"

"I told the girl who is my assistant to bring me clothes for changing, but she turned out to be quite quick on the uptake. She asked me to take this on my journey as well."

The basket was lined with quite a few handmade sandwiches.

Various fillings in toasted bread—uncured ham, mozarella cheese, proscuitto, lettuce, rucola and other vegetables. The sandwiches were quite visually appealing.

"Eh, these look very delicious."

"She's an apprentice in the [Copper Black Cross]—As a mage in training, she was almost expelled for her lack of aptitude. But because she's quite skilled in domestic chores, I tried her out as my assistant. Quite an interesting girl. I'll introduce her to you in the future."

Judging from the way Erica spoke of her, Godou imagined a girl in her early teens.

It was slightly later when Godou finally learned that she was Arianna-san and actually older than Erica. Only then was Godou struck by the shock of Erica's patronizing description.

In any case, Godou enjoyed the food, thoughtfully prepared by the maid he had never met before, as they continued the train journey.

The aerodynamic high-speed train took two hours to reach Florence from Milan.

During this time, Godou spent his time leisurely, chatting casually with Erica while he read Italian newspapers. Despite the fact that he was going to be approaching a monster's lair soon, he did not feel particularly nervous.

Somehow, his instincts were informing him.

Even if that eel-like giant organism really turned out to be a divine beast, he was not going to suffer in a desperate battle.

Godou knew this instinctively because he was capable of using a divine beast himself, the [Boar]. Speaking of desperate battles, those would occur only if the divine beast's master, a [Heretic God] or a Campione, was nearby—

"After all, I shouldn't be running into those guys."

Godou muttered to himself as they got off the train at the Florence station platform.

His battle against Melqart, the ancient Middle Eastern divine king, had taken place a month earlier. As for the fight with the godslayer Salvatore Doni, that was last night.

These momentous events should not be happening all the time. In terms of probability, it should be impossible.

Looking up, Godou found a vast expanse of the Italian sky, illuminated by the glow of dusk.

The red of the setting sun was mixing mysteriously with the darkness of evening, an exotic sight unlike dusk in Japan.

"Let's spend tonight in Florence and have a chat over dinner with the magi of this city. The [Capital of Lilies] is the magic association responsible for handling the incident. We'll first obtain information from them—"

Just as Erica began to speak, her cellphone rang with an incoming call.

Godou had a worrying premonition. To him, this melody sounded like an ominous sign. Indeed, it was the apostle from the realm of absurdity, the person capable of blowing theories of probability right out of the water—

"What's the matter, Uncle? Eh, Sir Salvatore?"

Then Godou realized he had forgotten about the most dangerous element.

The ancient city of Florence was one of the best known places even in Italy.

The river passing through this city, the Arno, followed the terrain of the Tuscany region and flowed from east to west into the Tyrrhenian Sea. The ancient city of Pisa, famous for its Leaning Tower, was located near the river's mouth.

Indeed, water was essential to human life, thus giving rise to cities adjacent to bodies of water.

Given that Godou was on a journey to the Arno's headwaters...

It would only be natural to advance east from Florence.

However, the car picking up Godou and Erica went south of Florence instead, taking them to the city of Siena located roughly in the center of Tuscany.

This was also a city with ancient origins, said to be a colony of the ancient Roman Empire of old.

A historical zone preserving streets straight from medieval times, the entire city was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Renowned as "the world's most beautiful public square, " Piazza del Campo was the city's most famous tourist attraction.

Despite being a plaza covered with red brick, it was actually not flat.

The plaza's surface was shaped like a bowl and sloped gently. Townsfolk and tourists would take up sitting or sleeping positions on the sloping surface, spending their time as they pleased.

"Coming to this place feels like a variety show's trip planning..."

Recalling his itinerary for the past day, Godou felt especially weary.

Lake Garda, Verona, Zurich, Milan, Florence and Siena.

These were all historically ancient cities and tourist destinations . But Godou passed through all of them with nary a stop, finally arriving here at Siena. What an exhausting trip, even crossing national boundaries.

By the time they arrived in Siena, night had fallen completely.

Although this was no time for touring around, Godou and Erica were still led to Piazza del Campo. Instead of sightseeing, the purpose was for meeting a certain someone.

"Ah Godou, it's been a while, my dear friend!"

The young man, who had parted ways with Godou only this morning, was waiting for him.

His cheerful frivolity carried a certain Latin quality indeed, suiting his personality quite well. Salvatore Doni was the Campione renowned as the King of Swords.

A black, short-sleeved shirt. Cotton pants. A pair of sneakers. He was dressed casually as usual.

Furthermore, a long cylindrical case laid fallen by his feet. Undoubtedly, it contained that dangerous and lethal weapon.

"Just come over yourself if you've got any business. We're on the way to somewhere else."

"Well, my dear aide is an excessively strict person, so I'm currently grounded from travel. He said I'm not allowed to go outside for now because I've caused too much trouble lately."

"Wow, your aide turns out to be someone with normal thought processes... But then again."

Godou replied to Doni who was grumbling on his own.

The message of "Let's meet briefly, okay♪" was transmitted from Doni to Paolo to Erica to finally reach Godou. He could have ignored it, but that would probably spur Doni into his ridiculous antics again.

Godou only came to Siena because he was worried about this issue.

"So let me say this. Even if you're grounded, don't get us involved."

"But you're going to exterminate the divine beast that's lurking in Monte Falterona, right?"

Doni asked with a grin.

To think he would receive the news so quickly as soon as the incident happened.

Godou shrugged. Although Doni looked like a carefree idiot—No, he really was a fool in actual fact. But at the same time, he was also cunningly astute. Godou was deeply struck by how important it was not to underestimate this man.

"Sorry, but could you step aside...? Just a minor suggestion."

"You mean you want to slay the monster in my place?"

"Yes yes. This opportunity to make a quick trip and be back before that annoying Andrea discovers, just yield that to me. You and me, we're best buddies, right?"

Godou was quite surprised. Indeed, Salvatore Doni was a belligerent man, but this sort of request seemed really out of character.

"Sir Salvatore. Allow me to point out that there is merely one monster sighted at Monte Falterona, the one that has been recognized as a divine beast. For a Campione of your stature, Sir, it would simply be a weak enemy."

At Godou's side, Erica interjected with a probing tone of voice.

Godou nodded. Indeed that was the truth. Even as a novice, Godou did not consider a divine beast to be any sort of threat. Even more so for Doni, the experienced warrior. Yet for some reason, he wanted to defeat the divine beast himself.

His insistence was quite strange. Tossing troublesome chores to Godou would probably be more suited to his liking.

"For a trivial task of this nature, I think you can just leave everything for us to handle."

"Yes, you have a point there, but I also have various circumstances on my end."

Doni smiled casually in response to Erica's intervention.

"Circumstances? What do you mean?"

"Well well. Some things need to be kept secret—"

Playing the fool to evade Godou's question, Doni picked up the cylindrical container on the ground.

Then he drew out a longsword of iron. This was the weapon with which he used his silver arm authority to manifest ultimate sharpness. Doni casually entered a stance with his sword.

"You intend to slay me to prevent me from exterminating the divine beast?"

"Of course not. Didn't we just have a deadly duel yesterday? I have no intention of having a rematch suddenly on the very next day. This is just a wager. Let's play a game."

Doni readied the longsword before him, pointing its tip at Godou.

"You win if you can block one strike from my sword. I'll yield the divine beast extermination to you this time. However, if you're unable to stop me... Let me do as I please."

"I can't stand you. Just deciding all that on your own..."

Godou bent forward slightly in response to Doni's sudden declaration.

He was taking the posture of a defending infielder in order to guard against Doni's sword.

Speaking of which—Godou noticed something. Even though it was not yet seven at night, Piazza del Campo was empty apart from the three of them.

Did Doni use some sort of suspicious magic to drive people away, or did he use his influence as a Devil King to prohibit access ?

In any case, a match was already unavoidable.

"Godou, do you really intend to fight!?"

"The situation will get weird if I leave things to this guy, so there's no choice."

Godou answered Erica who was a little worried. At the same time, he kept his attention focused on Doni.

The enemy raised his right arm, holding the sword in a stance.

In the parlance of Japanese swordsmanship, this would be called the *hassou-no-kamae* stance.[1] But since Doni's original posture was a flexible and natural stance, he really seemed like he was sticking to his claim of not intending to fight seriously.

Only because of that he was making this sort of attacking stance , intending to enjoy the game.

That said, this was still a dangerous game of death where one false move could lead to one's demise—

(...I guess I'll just have to try evading using the [Raptor]'s speed.)

(...Please be careful. This isn't an opponent who makes things easy.)

After whispering this reminder, Erica immediately retreated.

It was finally time for Godou vs Doni, one on one. The enemy's right arm glowed with silver radiance.

The previous night's battle had taken place roughly twenty-four hours earlier. Nuadha's silver arm authority, which Godou had sealed with the [Sword]'s spell words, was already recovered and currently usable.

"Hoho. We already know each other's tricks. This will be no different from yesterday."

Doni smiled quietly. This was different from his usual idiotic smile.

Rather, this was a smile of delight with a hint of malevolence, coming from a man who enjoyed risking his life in battle. The frivolous and handsome face instantly transformed into that of a dauntless warrior.

Godou and Doni were separated by a mere distance of five meters.

All Doni needed to do was pounce while swinging his sword and the distance would instantly shrink to zero.

However, the speed and acuity of Doni's swordsmanship was great enough to unlock Godou's [Raptor].

Verethragna's seventh incarnation possessed speed equal to lightning. Since Godou was unable to make precise movements due to the excessive speed, it was not that useful for making attacks.

On the other hand, it was quite a handy ability for defense and escape.

In order to use divine speed the instant Doni swung his sword, Godou readied his posture.

However, he suddenly trembled for the air around him felt rather heavy.

This was due to Doni's gaze. Without glaring at Godou or making threats, he was simply gazing cheerfully. One could even call it a gentle and quiet look.

But Godou was certain his intentions had been seen through.

Every single motion of Kusanagi Godou's body down to the smallest fingertip, the violent pounding in his heart resulting from the sudden battle, his breathing—

All were seen through completely. Heard. Observed. A complete grasp.

"He really is an opponent for which defense won't work huh..."

Godou muttered to himself. Just as his foe mentioned, they already knew each other's tricks.

Salvatore Doni's eyes were capable of seeing through divine speed. He also possessed mysterious movement techniques allowing him to close in before one could react, as well as horrifying swordsmanship that was challenging to evade.

Although this was only going to be a split-second battle, was Godou really capable of defending against martial arts as varied as a sword god's?

His gaze met with Doni's. The enemy went "Hmph" and smiled fearlessly. Godou had to muster his courage at this moment. If possible, he still wanted to take the least risky route and use the [Raptor] to evade—

However, in order to crush the enemy's strongest technique, Godou had no choice but to use his strongest power!

"The one unblunted and unapproachable, oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

"I hereby swear! I shall sever all existence in this world, slicing them in half with but a single cut!"

Precisely because they knew each other inside and out, they were able to have this sort of simple clash.

Throwing out his trump card before the horrific attack reached him, Godou then leveraged his residual momentum to defeat his enemy.

As a result, Godou's summoned [Boar] crashed boldly through the stone tiles of Piazza del Campo to make its way to the ground surface. At the same time, Godou prepared to charge straight into Doni.

The instant the divine beast was about to penetrate the surface, Doni's swinging magic sword struck the [Boar]'s pitch black forehead.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

The beast's roars resounded.

Swung by the silver arm, the magic sword stabbed itself deeply into the [Boar]'s forehead. The divine beast was destroyed by the time half of its head surfaced aboveground.

However, Doni went "Oh no!" and cried out.

Although it was excessively reckless, Godou did indeed manage to block one strike from Doni's sword.

Doni's sword of mental nothingness was achieved by letting the sword and the body move naturally. Hence, Godou knew that as soon as he launched a powerful attack, Doni would involuntarily attack in return—

The result ended exactly as he predicted. Godou nodded greatly . However—

"Although I did wonder if it would turn out like this when you agreed to the match, Godou... You never let down expectations, do you?"

Gazing at the "price" paid by Piazza del Campo, Erica remarked in amazement.

There was a deep crack resembling a fault line.

The ground was cracked open deeply in a straight line, tearing the plaza apart from one end to the other.

Very likely, this resulted from Godou choosing Piazza del Campo itself as the target when summoning the [Boar].

As soon as the pitch-black divine beast surfaced from the ground, it immediately caused destruction to the plaza.

Godou covered his head in his arms. Oh well, because the [Boar] was exterminated before it truly began to wreak destruction, one should be satisfied that only this level of damage resulted...

"W-Wait a minute. That was no fair at all. How about another match!?"

On the other hand, Doni kept harassing him, refusing to accept the result.

While reflecting on his own actions, Godou treated Doni's protests as meaningless noise.

Although the destruction was a terrible result, one should probably count their blessings that a commotion's embers were smothered before they could be truly set ablaze.

Nevertheless, why would Doni be interested in slaying a divine beast?

Just as Godou was about to question him, sirens could be heard in the distance.

Police or firefighters were apparently on the move. Naturally, they must be heading here. Probably for the sake of calming down this commotion, Erica took out her cellphone and contacted someone...

Part 4

In the end, Piazza del Campo's "aftermath" was handed over to Doni's subordinates to take care of.

Having fled the scene for now, Godou and company were seeking refuge in a nearby bar. Standing before them was the young man named Andrea Rivera.

He was wearing silver-rimmed glasses and dressed neatly in a suit.

Known for his serious demeanor, he was the one who served as Doni's butler.

Upon hearing of his job title, Godou was filled with the deepest sympathies.

After handling the aftermath by making some calls to local magic associations in Siena and issuing a few orders efficiently, Andrea Rivera swiftly turned around to face Godou again.

"Regarding this incident, let's consider it the fault of my lord, Salvatore Doni. We will take charge of the aftermath."

"I-I'm sorry. I've made trouble for you."

"No, as someone who serves a king, this is simply a part of my duties. Please don't let this weigh on your mind... Anyway, putting that aside, may I have a word with you?"

Ashamed of being Doni's accomplice, Godou was bowing his head when Andrea addressed him.

"A Campione causing trouble on momentary impulse is something that cannot be helped. There is no need to respond graciously to my lord's acts of folly. But please bear in mind the suffering and disaster brought upon the innocent commoners when you guys are horsing around."

Righteously and resolutely, Rivera used a calm tone of voice to admonish the king.

Truly befitting of Doni's chaperone. Godou was greatly impressed with this fact while feeling indebted to him. The Devil King's Butler turned to Erica:

"So, Erica Blandelli, may I rely on you to handle the divine beast incident? I must take that idi—Sir Salvatore back to a certain location."

"Of course you may, Sir Andrea."

Erica displayed a puzzled expression towards the young man who had almost called his lord an idiot.

"However, where do you intend to take Sir Salvatore?"

"Sir Salvatore was heavily injured in the fight against Kusanagi Godou and must go recuperate. He needs to be placed in a quiet environment for now so as to recover his energy."

"Eh!?"

Being the man in question, Doni was completely stunned to hear his butler's words.

He was the man who seemed completely fine in health apart from a sunburn from the [White Stallion] last night.

Doni's face was filled with a frivolous expression of puzzlement .

"What is this about, Andrea? I do have a bit of a burning sensation all over my body, but apart from that, I don't really think there's any problem with my health."

"Nonsense. This is an excellent opportunity. Why don't you just take it easy and rest for three or four months, okay?"

Switching instantly away from his respectful attitude towards Godou, Rivera addressed Doni as equals.

On closer examination, Rivera was twitching slightly near his temples. Probably due to anger. It was some time later when Godou would nod in understanding after hearing that these two men were friends from before Doni became a godslayer.

The Devil King's Butler spoke with what one would call a " sullen look of seriousness and austerity."

"I have already prepared for you a hospital no different from a prison on a remote island in the Indian Ocean. You will be forcibly hospitalized in a special sickroom on the twelfth floor underground. All you need to do there is cure your brain inside a jail akin to Alcatraz. You fucking lowlife whose mere existence causes trouble to the world, you're even worse than trash!"

Thinking back, Rivera's outpour of curses and insults was probably the climax of the whole affair.

Although Godou did suffer some hardship afterwards, no commotion could be worse than crossing paths with a Campione.

After Doni was taken away to be punished for his follies, Godou and Erica stayed the night in Siena.

The next morning, the weather was raining unfortunately. However, Rivera had arranged for a car and chauffeur to send them on the way. Thus Godou and Erica reached the incident's stage without issues.

This region of Casentino was located on the eastern side of Tuscany.

An area surrounded by natural habitat, one could find lush green fields, hills, forests and valleys.

In accordance with its designation as a national forest park, the region was virtually devoid of manmade structures apart from roads and the scattered homes of residents, as far as Godou could see along the car journey.

As for Monte Falterona which Doni had mentioned, this was Erica's explanation:

"A streamlet that is born in Falterona / And not a hundred miles of course suffice it... This is Dante's Divine Comedy. Purgatorio, Canto XIV."

"So this is the river it's referring to."

Godou and Erica sat side by side in the rear seats as the car sped along its way. A stream was flowing beside the road. It was the Arno River.

It was supposed to progressively widen as it flowed through the lands of Tuscany to become a wide and major river.

Probably due to the rain, the river volume seemed to be higher than normal.

"So the only place we need to visit is that Falte whatever mountain?"

"It would be ideal if it were as simple as that. However, the target seems to have left its lair and moved its habitat elsewhere."

"Where did the monster appear yesterday?"

"Medieval castle ruins at the foot of Monte Falterona. Having said that, the ruins are just a few castle walls that remain standing. Apart from that, there's nothing."

Erica opened and examined a map of the area as she spoke.

"In fact, yesterday's divine beast-like organism has made an appearance in some other castle ruins. Crashing into and damaging the castle walls, it even caused a ruckus before leaving. Luckily, no humans were caught up in it, but seeing as it's quite close to the city after all... It could get dangerous."

"That's very true. By the way, that eel monster that's like a snake—"

After listening, Godou tried to probe an issue that had been bothering him.

"Since it has gone to castle ruins twice, could it be that it likes old places?"

"That could be true. Alternatively, it might prefer to be near water."

"Water?"

"Yes. Since ancient times, cities and villages have always been constructed near water. Based on the terrain, the Arno River basin naturally contains many towns and structures built since ancient times. Also, the second appearance was this place."

"Eh, that's really close to the river."

Seeing the spot on the map Erica was pointing to, Godou nodded.

"We will be in this place, contemplating our next move while we wait for the Florentine magi who are tracking the beast. If my predictions are accurate, we could very well discover the target today."

"Then let's stay in this area to search for now."

"It'd be wiser to wait for their investigation's report first."

Godou and Erica went on standby at a town near Monte Falterona and the Arno River.

Then at a time one could consider late night, Erica's cellphone received a report of discovery.

The two instantly got on a car and rushed towards the Arno River.

Then Godou saw it. Beneath the pouring rain, a black and slender creature was swimming on the surface of the flooded river. Indeed, it did look like a giant eel.

Putting on a raincoat, Godou braved the rainstorm to enter the torrential Arno River.

He wanted to observe the "enemy." But perhaps because it sensed his presence, the black creature submerged itself into the water.

Erica was rather intrigued by this wariness, uncharacteristic of a vicious monster.

"Clearly it remained calm when the searching magi discovered it. Perhaps it's because it realized you're a Campione, Godou?"

"Are things like divine beasts capable of that?"

"It wouldn't be strange, no, because it's a supernatural creature after all. Among the monitoring personnel, a spirit vision user apparently saw that it's a divine beast with ties to a snake deity."

"So, handling it like an eel isn't actually going to work."

In any case, there was nothing to discuss until it was caught.

Thus the overnight chase began.

Furthermore, they requested support from the Florentine magi to use search magic, communicating by cellphone and pursuing by car.

When dawn almost arrived, or rather, during morning...

Godou and Erica finally faced off the monster again.

The place was a rural town called Poppi on the shore of the Arno River. Around here was a medieval fort dating back to the fifteenth century.

Using borrowed binoculars to observe the monster that was roaming leisurely, Godou and Erica murmured to each other.

"Not only is it not an eel, it's not even a snake..."

"It should be called a dinosaur instead. I remember seeing a similar one in an old movie."

A certain action movie whose stage was set in a theme park where dinosaurs had been brought to life using the power of science.

Not far from their eyes was a species resembling the dinosaur that became a symbol of the movie. Called the velociraptor in the story, these carnivorous dinosaurs were slender, agile, cunning and vicious.

"A true dinosaur fan would probably call it something like the *Deinonychus* or the *Utahraptor*."

"Oh my, that name really suits its appearance."

"What do you mean?"

"*Deinonychus*. It means 'terrible claw' in Latin."

Hearing the explanation of Erica who was proficient in linguistics, Godou nodded.

The black *Deinonychus* before them was walking upright on its tough hind legs, with a massive, sharp, hooked claw on each foot.

Its body was roughly seven meters long, with a slender torso and a very long tail.

Its dorsal outline was probably impossible to see except for when it was swimming on the surface of the water.

Especially due to its black color, it was indeed quite easy to be mistaken for a snake or an eel.

"Normally, no one would expect a dinosaur in this river."

Finally figuring out how the eel description came about, Godou muttered as he summoned the [Boar] to defeat the creature.

The battle needed to be finished immediately because it would be troublesome if the enemy escaped into the water. The pitch-black giant boar swiftly sent the dinosaur flying in accord with expectations.

Godou could no longer remember how much time it took to knock out the enemy. Roughly three or four minutes perhaps?

After all, there were other problems outside of combat. The [Boar]'s howls were mixed with shockwaves as usual and ended up smashing the ground which had softened from the pouring rain.

As it happened, Godou's foothold on a hillside collapsed as a consequence.

Rolling down the slope, Godou fell into the Arno River and spent several hours in a predicament, drifting along the flooded river's turbid currents.

Nevertheless, Godou would naturally come to forget what happened in this region.

This stemmed from the never ending series of conflicts that arrived henceforth from May of that year, after he became a Campione.

A duel with Doni at the beginning of May, followed directly by the expedition to Tuscany. After returning to Japan for a week, he was called to Italy again by Erica and forced to attend a seance with dozens of magi. When the end of May rolled in, the great event of Athena's duel happened—

Thereafter, battles and troublesome incidents still continued to take place in succession.

Various matters, such as the fact of traveling being more exhausting than combat, were inevitably buried in the back of his mind.

Consequently, Godou had almost forgotten about this incident after the passage of nine months. Nevertheless, what happened back then was going to lead Godou into yet another troublesome adventure.

Chapter 2 - News from Italy

Part 1

Kusanagi Godou had spent the year end and New Year's in the South Seas, practically on the equator.

When it finally came time to return to his home and country, he really felt quite removed from the New Year's spirit.

Furthermore, his grandfather was traveling in Bhutan and his little sister Shizuka was vacationing in the Caribbean. Although his mother was in Japan, this was the time of the year when she occupied her days with New Year parties, so Godou hardly ever saw her.

Anyway, Godou finally returned home to Japan.

"Since it happens to be January, I believe we should pay a New Year's homage before the winter vacation ends. As a New Year's event, let's all go to Mariya's place."

" "....." "

At the Kusanagi residence, Erica and Liliana gazed subtly at Godou when he invited them.

As a side note, Ena had already returned to her ancestral home at Chichibu a while ago.

"A New Year's homage? I recall it being a Japanese custom. To make a wish at a shrine at the beginning of each year."

"A godslayer making wishes to gods? What would that be like, I really wonder..."

"I-It doesn't matter, okay? I can do New Year things just like ordinary people. Besides, I'm not even sure what gods exactly are worshiped in Japanese shrines!"

Liliana murmured with heartfelt emotion while Erica expressed her doubts sardonically.

In response to the two knights' reactions, Godou blurted out sacrilegious words.

In spite of it all, the trio departed for Shiba Park anyway, to pay a visit to Nanao Shrine whose origins and deity worshiped were unknown to them despite their frequent visits.

"Welcome back, Onii-sama. You've been working hard this January!"

"Thank you, everyone, for visiting despite the cold weather. Please step this way."

Entering the confines of Nanao Shrine, they were greeted and received by the Mariya sisters.

Hikari and Yuri. Shinto shrines always had their "busy period" before and after the year end. As Hime-Miko, the two girls had

been working for the past few days consecutively. Godou greeted the sisters who were dressed as miko.

"Have you been coming here every day since the year end, Hikari?"

"Yes. Despite how I may look, I was actually acting as Onee-chan's substitute!"

"From what I have heard, Hikari has been very diligent. She worked incessantly over New Year's Eve and the first three days of January."

The older sister's gentle gaze rested on the younger sister who had answered in a joking tone of voice.

As one of Musashino's important sanctuaries, Nanao Shrine was where Yuri was stationed as the proper miko responsible for the " Hime" role. For the time being, Hikari was still an apprentice.

But because her older sister had followed Godou on his trip to Malaysia, Hikari became her substitute.

"By the way, this shrine really does not have many visitors."

"This place was never popular in the first place."

Liliana and Erica looked around inside the shrine inquisitively.

Information about Nanao Shrine was restricted by the History Compilation Committee. Consequently, very few knew its location here, apart from nearby residents.

Hence, visitors were usually quite rare. But today was different.

There were roughly ten people enjoying the New Year spirit as they casually strolled about. This number of ordinary people was usually not seen in this shrine. They were all members of the elderly. Apart from Godou's group, there were no other young people.

"Sure enough, because of the time of the year, pious individuals from a long time ago and nearby people would make a special New Year's visit to pay homage here."

After explaining the situation, Yuri took everyone to a corner inside the shrine.

Displayed on what resembled a folding table for sale were strips of fortune telling paper and decorative arrows for warding off evil. For Nanao Shrine, this was a rare sight similar to an ordinary shrine for once.

Young miko were selling these things, working part-time for the short term.

There was even sweet mild sake offered to visitors. Godou, Erica and Liliana all drank the warm, sweet, alcoholic drink, warming up their bodies which were cold from the chilly air.

Then the group entered the worship hall to insert coins into the offering box, ring the bell and clap twice.

Although it was just a casual shrine visit, it did count as finishing the New Year's homage. Godou felt rather satisfied with having completed part of the New Year's festivities.

Then on the next day after the shrine visit, his little sister Shizuka returned to the Kusanagi residence. Coincidentally, grandfather Kusanagi Ichirou also came home on the same day.

"This is a souvenir... But just to let you know, I bought it in Hawaii."

"Uh, are Macadamia nuts really in season?"

The grandfather mischievously took out a gift-box of snacks, causing Godou to smile wryly.

In a situation like this, it was probably something of a Kusanagi family tradition to refrain from snide comments like "Weren't you traveling in Bhutan?" On the other hand, Shizuka inclined her head in puzzlement.

"Grandpa aside, who had been overseas during this entire time.. ."

Staring repeatedly at the face of the brother she had not seen for some time, she questioned:

"Why are you tanned, Onii-chan? It also feels like you've gone swimming."

The speaker, Shizuka, had also picked up quite a tan herself.

She probably sunbathed quite a bit in the summer-like Caribbean. Godou really could not bring himself to say "I actually went to Southeast Asia."

Godou tried to skirt the issue while under his sister's subtle gaze.

"Oh... It's New Year, you see. A friend who lives in the south invited me over."

"What is this!? So, Onii-chan, this trip wouldn't happen to include one of the girls from Erica-san's group, would it!?"

"..."

"Of course I'm right. Who was it!? Erica-san, Mariya-senpai, or Liliana-san? Or heaven forbid—All of them together!?"

In the end, Shizuka discerned the truth through her mysteriously observant powers.

Meanwhile, the grandfather had no intention of probing the issue. Winking to Godou, he entered the kitchen to prepare dinner. This was also part of the Kusanagi family tradition, indeed.

After surviving various incidents, the third term of school began.

Compared to the hustle and bustle in January, Godou's days were temporarily peaceful for now.

Oh well, there were a few troubles too. Such as working as part-timers with Shizuka and going to Okutama to slay a divine beast. Although the latter turned into a predicament involving a duel with a giant centipede-like creature, at least the incident was resolved before it could turn into a serious affair.

Just like that, the first month of the new year passed peacefully for the most part.

Godou was also studying diligently for exams. During the third term, Jounan Academy eschewed midterms and held final examinations directly in early February.

Thus, the first February school day came to an end.

Godou and three classmates were putting in serious effort, sweeping the area around the school gates.

This was because they were on duty. During this time of the year, fallen leaves were even more abundant than rubbish. The others on duty were Nanami, Sorimachi and Takagi—commonly known as the Three Idiots.

Recalling a certain incident, Godou struck up conversation with his friends.

"So, do you guys have any plans for Valentine's Day this year?"

He merely posed a casual question. However, Godou suddenly jumped.

Two seconds later, the former location of Godou's head was sliced through by a sweeping broom handle. This would be a full-powered sword strike unleashed against the upper region. An all-out attack from Takagi who belonged to the kendo club.

"What the heck are you doing, idiot!?"

"Sorry, Kusanagi, my body could not help but move on its own."

Takagi declared boldly with an expression like a wandering swordsman from historical novels.

The slicing attack was performed quite proficiently. Were Godou not accustomed to battle already, he could not have dodged it.

"But forgive me, it definitely was your fault just now..."

"Yeah, Takagi is right..."

"You just committed taboo, so don't complain if you get killed..."

"What's the matter, guys?"

Not only Takagi but also Sorimachi and Nanami were all bearing grim expressions.

Godou was troubled by the trio's eyes that glimmered with subtle, murderous intent. Why would they be this angry? Incomprehensible.

"You just committed what a socially fulfilled person should never do. February 14—Together with December 24, these two dates should be listed as taboo judgment days in modern Japan which has been corrupted by love-capitalism. Even if the gods are willing to forgive such atrocities, we shall not."

"Yeah, absolutely unforgivable."

Sorimachi's gaze expressed agreement with Nanami's performance while Takagi questioned Godou as if performing a forceful counterattack.

"By the way, how many guaranteed offers of chocolate do you have!?"

"I get one from my sister every year at least. There are no other guaranteed offers."

Troubled by the Three Idiots' reactions, Godou replied.

"Shizuka—my sister—would suddenly make a very displeased face after counting the courtesy chocolate I receive. So there's nothing to be jealous about."

"Gah, not only do you receive massive amounts of chocolate, you even have a tsundere little sister!"

"Furthermore, you deliberately omitted Erica-sama and the others!"

"No, it's true that I'm good friends with them, but that doesn't mean they'll give me chocolate for sure. That girl Erica doesn't care for these things in particular, so she'll simply overlook them inattentively."

Although Godou did not hate sweet things, he did not especially like them either.

Not really caring much about chocolate, Godou continued to the main topic.

"So, for this year's Valentine's Day, I know someone who is holding a chocolate-eating gathering for those who are ditching girls. You guys wanna go?"

"WHAT!?"

For some unknown reason, Nanami reacted to the invitation with shock. So did the other two.

Puzzled by the trio's responses, Godou continued to sell the idea.

"My acquaintance is quite the popular person and wishes to hold an event for all the guys to take care of the mountain of courtesy chocolate."

" " "....." " "

This was the plan concocted by Sayanomiya Kaoru, the young member of the History Compilation Committee's core leadership. Kaoru had already extended her invitation to ten-odd acquaintances, "eligible bachelors" from among subordinates who were single, Amakasu, and others.

The venue was going to be Lu Yinghua's shop, a place which the Three Idiots already knew about. The "Peerless Statesman" maid cafe in Akihabara.

Compared to the expected amount of chocolate, the numbers set to attend were currently not quite enough.

"A-Are you going too, Kusanagi, no way...?"

"I don't have anything scheduled that day, so that's the plan for now. You guys can come too, how about it? It'll be like Christmas, wouldn't that be nice?"

" " "....." " "

"Oh yeah, however, the event organizer did mention that it'd be better if I don't attend. That said, I have no idea why I'm being excluded."

While Godou muttered to himself, the Three Idiots suddenly became despondent, having suffered a serious blow.

"Bastard, to think you'd join this kind of planned event on February 14..."

"Th-This must be the difference between the desperate and the complacent..."

"Anyway! How popular is the guy who planned this ridiculous event in the first place!?"

"Eh? Well, that person's popularity level is a little exaggerated, but you guys probably won't believe it..."

Godou faltered as he found himself confronted with a fundamental problem.

Briefly considering the person named Sayanomiya Kaoru, she was still quite a presence even if one were to ignore her membership in the History Compilation Committee. After all, she was as handsome as a character taken out from shoujo manga.

How should he explain to the Three Idiots? Godou began to agitate over the issue.

Part 2

"Something relatively easy to make... You could do a chocolate and espresso style tiramisu."

After thinking briefly, that was Liliana Kranjcar's suggestions.

The location was after school in a classroom. But rather than the Year 1 Class 5 classroom where Liliana belonged, this was Class 6 next door. This was the class of Mariya Yuri and the two others who had called them here.

Currently, Liliana was teaching how to make western confectionery.

"In addition to whipping egg yolk and mascarpone cheese to produce the cheese cream, you need chocolate that is not excessively sweet and espresso with the addition of white wine."

"Hmm, it does seem quite tasty. However."

"Instead of chocolate, doesn't this feel more like a cake?"

The ones commenting were Class 6's Miyama-san and Sawa-san .

"I have no choice but to close my eyes and think carefully at this time... Despite their pleasant appearances, chocolates sold commercially have lost much of the cocoa's flavor. I think handmade truffles and raw chocolate will taste much better than store-bought ones."

"The way shop-bought chocolate is tempered would be no good ..."[2]

Liliana murmured as if coming to a conclusion. From the side, Yuri also remarked with a troubled expression.

This lesson was the result of Miyama-san's search for advice.

'Valentine's Day is drawing near, so I'd like to make some chocolate... But what's the best way to do it?'

Known for her cooking skills and being in the same class, Yuri was the first person they consulted.

However, Yuri was not as familiar with the preparation of western confectionary as she was with general cooking. Hence, she brought her friend—Liliana Kranjcar—who made cakes during holidays from time to time.

"Because it's a rare chance to present something handmade, I can understand your feelings in taking a serious approach."

Liliana nodded at Miyama-san.

"In order to support your love, we also should craft a well thought-out plan while we are here discussing."

"E-Ehhhhh!? N-No, that's not right. This isn't for confessing!"

"Miyama only wants to make cakes because of club activities. She's actually part of the cooking research club. Then because

Valentine's Day is approaching, their next club activity is apparently chocolate making."

"What? Oh I see now."

Petite Miyama-san was so flustered her face had become bright red. The glasses-wearing Sawa-san explained cheerfully.

Liliana was quite disappointed. In order to prepare for the approaching "real battle" on February 14, she had been dedicating her efforts towards preparing her recipes. To think she had mistaken Miyama-san for a fellow comrade.

"Liliana-san and Mariya-san... Neither of you asked in the first place. In any case, you're both going to give chocolate to Kusanagi, right?"

"I-I am going to give Godou-san chocolate!?"

Sawa-san shrugged as she remarked, prompting Yuri's sudden panic.

"Umm, although I have never given anything like that to a male apart from my father and grandfather... I must try my best at this, I suppose!?"

"What you do in this regard depends on how you feel, Mariya-san. We're not going to judge you."

"I-Indeed you are right. Then I really must hurry with preparations..."

Yuri whispered softly. Meanwhile, Sawa-san and Miyama-san's gazes met.

"Kusanagi-san huh. Although he's a 'good fellow,' at the same time, he's also quite a 'good-for-nothing'..."

"Strangely enough, there's something pimp or gangster-like about him. Maybe I really should try stabbing Kusanagi once or twice with a knife for real...?"

" "....." "

This time, it was Liliana and Yuri's turn to exchange glances. Moreover, the one making the radical proposal was Sawa-san who belonged to the drama club. Despite being just a first year student, she was a talented girl who personally took care of starring and production roles.

Sawa-san apologized frantically.

"Sorry, did I say anything to displease you two?"

"No, no. We have prepared ourselves long ago, in the event that something like that might eventually happen to Godou-san... He really is incorrigible."

"But it is quite surprising to find fellow students who are aware of that aspect of his."

Yuri sighed as Liliana nodded in agreement.

"I believe his problematic aspects as a person are difficult to understand in the eyes of others."

"Godou-san has always been a strong and nice person."

"Kind and responsible without prejudice. A person with a stable temperament."

"Although he does not like meddling in other people's business, he is very good at taking care of others."

"Also, he has the kind of personality that makes it impossible for others to stop him once he gets worked up..."

"But without all these qualities, he would not be Godou-san..."

Liliana and Yuri spoke alternately, nodding to each other.

Whenever the contradictory qualities of Kusanagi Godou were brought up, this was the inevitable outcome. Clearly a benevolent person who is conscientious about the greater good, but why did situations always turn out like that?

But upon hearing Liliana and Yuri's worries, Miyama-san remarked softly.

"Are you actually praising or complaining about Kusanagi-kun, I really don't get it..."

" "!?" "

"By the way, I've wanted to ask this for some time. During the winter break, did you all visit the beach together, somewhere south?"

"Sawa-san, why would you ask that!?"

"Very simple. It's clearly midwinter, but you all came back tanned."

" "....." "

With the critical fact pointed out to them, Liliana and Yuri were speechless. They had not expected to be found out in this manner.

"Kusanagi-san's family went along as well, right? I've heard that his little sister, who studies in the middle school division, also came back with quite a tan."

"Taking family and an army of girlfriends to the beach, that's really acting like a king."

Although it was not entirely true, false achievements were being publicized and spreading around.

In any case, that was how the gathering finally concluded. Exiting the classroom together, Sawa, Miyama and Mariya Yuri parted ways to head off to the activity rooms of their respective clubs. On the other hand, Liliana made her way to the school gates.

It was currently dusk and both the school yard and the building itself were illuminated orange by the setting sun.

"What a coincidence..."

Seeing the boys at the front gates, Liliana murmured to herself.

It was her lord, Kusanagi Godou. However, she also witnessed a strange scene. The trio of Nanami, Sorimachi and Takagi in his company suddenly raced towards the setting sun.

With tears streaming down their faces, the trio resembled abandoned dogs.

Meanwhile, Godou was left behind, scratching his head and going "What a pain."

Not long after the Three Idiots had sprinted off into the sunset...

The silver-haired student came over to the side of Godou who had been left behind alone, dumbfounded.

"Did anything happen, Kusanagi Godou?"

"No, I'm not even sure myself."

Naturally, the one asking incredulously was Liliana. She looked like she was just about to leave school to go home.

The school gates was not a great place for talking, so Godou and Liliana walked over to the street and began to converse behind the gingko trees.

"We were talking about plans for February 14. Right after I mentioned I had a very popular acquaintance, these guys looked like they had suffered a massive blow for some reason..."

"Very popular—surely Sayanomiya Kaoru, right?"

"Yeah. I think what I said about Kaoru-san was the decisive factor in their change."

Godou had omitted her gender for now and tried to tone down his description of her as much as possible.

Quite handsome in appearance, well-versed in both martial and cultural arts, popular with the ladies, etc. This resulted in the Three Idiots crying out simultaneously and cursing the world as they made a mad dash towards the setting sun.

After listening from start to finish, Liliana murmured slowly.

"Indeed it is quite a mystery. Why did they have to run?"

"I didn't say anything bad, right? Anyway, I'll try talking to them again tomorrow."

"I think that is appropriate. Indeed, confirming the way one another thinks is fundamental to interpersonal relationships."

Liliana answered Godou's question with a serious, knightly expression.

This was the kind of statement the Diavolo Rosso would never make. As expected of Liliana. Godou was impressed.

However, the ponytailed female knight suddenly changed the subject.

"By the way, there was something in that conversation that I cannot ignore."

"Eh, which part?"

"Naturally, the fact that your baffling plans are infringing on the sanctity of Valentine's Day."

Liliana was scolding angrily.

"This day is a venerable celebration of lovers. To be honest, I was quite surprised that it has even permeated Japan deeply..."

"Is deeply permeated really a good thing? I think it's just troublesome."

Reportedly, the custom of only girls giving away chocolate was entirely a Japanese creation.

For example, in places like Italy, the men would send cards to express messages of love. While Godou was recalling this fact, Liliana was talking with a know-it-all expression:

"The difference in details is just a trivial problem. What is important is the attitude of expressing your love to those who are important to you."

"But putting love aside, the custom of courtesy chocolate is really a pain in the ass..."

"Having fun like this would be nice once in a while, would it not?"

Godou was reminded of White Day[3] every year when Shizuka would always start a noisy argument by going "Take me out somewhere."

Recalling this annual affair, Godou had expressed his opinion but Liliana's attitude was not swayed at all.

"Sorry, let me make a correction. Confirming one another's thoughts is not only fundamental to interpersonal relationships, it is of ultimate importance. Trampling this principle will lead to people getting hurt—"

Liliana glared at Godou with reprimanding eyes.

"In order to prevent a problematic Valentine's Day, I will make proper preparations as your knight."

"A-As a knight?"

"Yes, confectionery recipes for making chocolate are fully prepared. I have already cleared my schedule for that day and made myself completely available."

Liliana's slender face, reminiscent of a fairy's, swiftly drew close .

Godou could feel his heart racing in response to the girl whose face was not limited to stern beauty.

"I believe you are obliged as a king to respond appropriately. For example, take me to a place where we can admire a beautiful night view together. You can also prepare a card filled with passionate feelings as a gift."

"T-Together with you, Liliana?"

Godou felt intimidated by this proposal which seemed more suited to close couples rather than between a king and his knight.

Liliana was leaning so close that they seemed like they were about to embrace. However, Godou was reminded of all the behavior they had engaged repeatedly at this kind of distance.

Perhaps because of that, Godou could not help himself from nodding involuntarily.

"I-Indeed you have a point, I guess I have no choice but to consider these types of activities... Right?"

"Y-Yes, we are king and knight. I believe that these events are very important for affirming each other's contract of lord and subordinate."

Liliana spoke with a shyness that had replaced her serious expression.

Her stern gaze, which had been focused on Godou, weakened slightly and felt more womanly. To go even further, there was also a sense of connection between accomplices privy to each other's lies.

Perhaps due to embarrassment, Liliana shifted her gaze away slightly.

"Besides, apart from me, there should be others whom you need to show your care towards, right?"

"Uh..."

"Before indulging Sayanomiya Kaoru in her games, please handle things properly on this side."

"G-Got it."

It really seemed like the advice a capable adjutant and grand chamberlain would provide. However, Godou could feel subtle sarcasm in her words.

Feeling stung, Godou nodded.

"I think it'd be quite fun to do silly things with guys only on occasion, okay..."

"Although I can understand the importance of spending time in the company of male friends, your timing is wrong. Consider doing things with them next time, please."

Godou and Liliana's conversation deliberately ignored the gender of the person who had planned the gathering. But suddenly, Liliana displayed a pondering expression on her face. She was muttering to herself, something like "Wait a minute, if that is the case..."

"What's up, Liliana?"

"Oh, nothing, I was just contemplating something for a bit. Alternatively, Kusanagi Godou, you could come to my home late at night after attending the gathering—"

"Late at night!?"

"Y-Yes. If my home is no good then how about somewhere else outside..."

The muttering female knight, whose personality was prone to delusions, suddenly became startled.

She probably realized her ideas were going too far. As the notion of spending late night on February 14 with Liliana alone flashed across his mind, Godou yelled loudly:

"There are so many things wrong with that, in all sorts of ways, look at it, come on!"

"I-Indeed you are right. Please pretend you did not hear what was said just now."

Because both of them were serious people, it was very easy to reach an agreement during times like these.

Discarding the memory of the proposal from just now, the pair began the "aftermath."

Since Godou was the only one remaining to sweep, there were still a few places to clean up. Then he had to return various things such as the brooms to the equipment room. Filled with fallen leaves, the garbage bags needed to be thrown in the dumpster of course.

Once everything was handled, the sun had already set completely.

"By the way, Mariya Yuri said she would visit the tea ceremony club before going home."

"Is that so? Then let's wait for her and leave together."

Godou took out his cellphone in response to Liliana's information.

He tried calling Yuri and found out she was just about to leave school and head home. Hence, Godou and Liliana stood at the front gates to wait for her—Roughly fifteen minutes later, the

Yamato Nadeshiko came out with a deeply troubled expression. Clutched tensely in her hand was her cellphone, the tool she ought to be using only when communicating with Godou.

"Godou-san, Liliana-san! I have a special matter I wish to discuss with you two."

As soon as she saw them, Yuri made an unexpected request.

Part 3

As a result, Godou, Yuri and Liliana arrived in Akihabara shortly after.

The school they attended, Jounan Academy, was located in the Nezu neighborhood of the Bunkyou ward. Taking the train to Akihabara took half an hour and was a simple detour on the way home from school.

The trio were now at the first floor of a large scale consumer electronics store.

"So, what are you looking for, Mariya?"

"Y-Yes, I believe it is called... a laptop computer."

Yuri responded to Godou's query as if she were rather unsettled . Even unspoken, it was obvious that technologically incompetent as she was, Yuri had trouble understanding the concept of laptop computers.

"There are so many types here..."

"Apparently so..."

After looking at the products displayed at the counter, Yuri sighed.

The first floor—the level attracting the most customers—carried many different models of cellphones, laptops and desktops, the main products of this type of store.

"But Mariya Yuri, why are you suddenly interested in computers?"

Feeling intrigued, Liliana asked. Just earlier at the school gates, Yuri had made a request, saying "T-This time I-I need to buy a computer, could you accompany me to have a look!?"

Wanting to ask the same question, Godou immediately nodded.

"It really doesn't add up. Mariya, you're not good at using these things, right?"

"Y-Yes. Actually, my father promised to buy a gift for Hikari to celebrate her elementary school graduation. She said a computer would be nice."

"Speaking of which, she will become a middle schooler starting in April."

Liliana mentioned softly. The Mariya family's second daughter was currently in sixth grade.

As a side note, Godou's younger sister was also set to graduate to Jounan Academy's high school division in April.

"Then just now I was talking to my father on the phone... He said he wanted to buy me the same gift. Although I said it was not necessary, he replied that it will eventually come in handy."

This conversation happened after she had received Godou's phone call.

Which explained the gloomy expression Yuri displayed when she was clutching her cellphone earlier. Yuri sighed.

"Your father is so generous, Mariya."

"Actually, back in middle school, I sometimes had to leave home to undergo Hime-Miko training and missed out on graduation blessings as a result. That said, I never intended to have it made up for."

The Mariya sisters' father seemed to be the type to indulge his daughters. As a fellow man, Godou could understand the feeling. He nodded.

"Although I can understand his kindness, it feels quite troubling because I am absolutely certain I will not be able to use this thing."

Gazing at the counter with troubled eyes, Yuri suddenly asserted resolutely.

As someone technologically incompetent to the point that even writing text messages on the cellphone proved to be tough battles for her, the declaration sounded very convincing coming from her. Thinking that to himself. Godou laughed.

"P-Please do not make fun of me, okay!?"

"Sorry my bad. But it's true, it sounds quite convincing when you're the one saying it, Mariya."

"Seriously... You are the most annoying whenever you make comments like that, Godou-san."

While speaking, Yuri deliberately turned her face away as if sulking.

Godou felt happy to see Yuri's recent displays of this kind of attitude and behavior in spite of her upbringing as a sheltered Yamato Nadeshiko. He considered it a sign of intimacy between them.

Despite being teased, Yuri also smiled in secret.

Finding their dispute a little strange, the pair gazed into each other's eyes and smiled. Meanwhile, Liliana suddenly walked away with an awkward smile.

The silver-haired girl was approaching the tablet computer corner.

Apprehensively, she pressed a tablet's LCD touchscreen with her index finger.

Then her finger slid across the LCD with a "whoosh," tapped and began to try out various things.

Finding it interesting, Liliana moved her finger nonstop as though playing with a toy.

Yuri and Godou walked over and spoke up.

"Speaking of which, you don't use computers very much, Liliana."

"Because Karen is responsible for using this type of tool at home ."

Karen Jankulovski was the Kranjcar maid as well as an apprentice witch.

Mentioning the name of the girl whom Godou recognized, Liliana continued to manipulate the tablet.

When Liliana discovered how she could use two fingers to zoom in and out inside a map application, she went "Ooh!" with her eyes glimmering brightly. Completely unlike her usual sternness, Liliana's child-like behavior was very much her style too .

"Wouldn't it be easier to write using computers?"

"Karen has also tried to persuade me before, but that is not true at all. Only by writing with one's own hand can words carry power and soul."

Writing novels was Liliana's secret hobby.

Her multiple works apparently contained her various feelings.

After that, because Yuri was taken aback by the excessive variety of laptop computers, Godou and the girls went over to the household appliance area for a walk.

He could tell that the two girls were very interested in electric stoves, rice cookers and other products.

'Steam heating mode!' 'Uniform heating on the stone kiln's dome!' 'Vacuum pressure cooking!' 'Genuine earthenware pot!' With great passion, the girls read out the various advertising slogans.

Not exactly mad about home appliances, Godou was bored out of his mind. But upon further thought, deciding it was fine as long as the two girls were enjoying themselves, he proceeded to follow them. Just at this moment, Yuri almost collapsed.

"Mariya!?"

"Are you okay, Mariya Yuri!?"

Yuri suddenly tripped herself and almost fell down.

Entering a panic, Godou and Liliana immediately rushed over to support her. Yuri went "N-Nothing serious..." softly and mustered her vigor with resilience. Without allowing Godou and Liliana to support her by the arm, she stood up by herself.

"I am just a little unsteady on my feet... Perhaps it is because of the crowd."

Although it was a week night, this was a large scale consumer electronics store quite close to a terminal train station after all.

There was indeed quite a crowd in the store, noisy and bustling.

"Although I do not feel tired at all, this happens occasionally."

"Speaking of which, you have been absent from school due to illness a few days in the past month..."

"Can it be because you forced yourself too much that time on the island?"

Liliana frowned with worry while Godou recalled the past incident.

On Circe's island in South Seas, Yuri had used spells and magical power beyond her limits.

"No. That was already a month ago."

"But didn't Lucretia-san have to sleep and rest last time because she overused her energy?"

In response to Yuri's denial, Godou asked again. There was one time when Lucretia Zola had exhausted her magical power because she was caught up in the fight between the war god Verethragna and the divine king Melqart.

Perhaps because Godou and Liliana kept staring at her intently, Yuri gave up and sighed lightly.

"It really is fine normally, but only when I go to crowded places do I feel exhausted and dizzy..."

"Perhaps it is the downside to awakening the power of psychic sensing."

Liliana looked with concern at the Hime-Miko whose psychic sensing ability had grown in strides recently.

Psychic sensing was a rare spirit power allowing hearts and minds to be linked together.

Princess Alice was the one who had instructed Yuri in this power. However, the White Miko-Hime had also overstrained her body due to excessively potent spirit powers and had to spend the majority of her time resting in bed.

Recalling Alice's condition, Godou and Liliana exchanged glances.

"Although I do not think the symptoms are serious, let us switch to a different location for now..."

"Yeah, since it's close by, let's head over to Yinghua's place."

Inside a certain multi-tenant building situated in Akihabara, there was a maid cafe named the "Peerless Statesman."

Godou, Yuri and Liliana paid a visit there together. The entire group entered the VIP room located in the depths of the shop. Immediately, they were met with frivolous greetings.

"Ah, it's been a while, everyone."

On closer examination, they found Amakasu Touma sitting on the couch, clearly in the middle of slacking off again.

"Oh, you often come here too, Amakasu-san?"

"Occasionally. Sometimes I grab a quick cup of tea here in between jobs."

In contrast to Yuri's surprised reaction, Amakasu was smiling nonchalantly.

Openly admitting he sneaked out to slack off, this agent seemed as useless as a lantern in broad daylight. On the other hand, the Hime-Miko's condition did not seem to have any further problems. Godou immediately motioned with his eyes to his silver-haired grand chamberlain.

Liliana was able to stop worrying as a result. She nodded lightly in response.

Deciding to have Yuri take a break here, Godou seated himself on a nearby stool. Yuri and Liliana also sat down on a couch opposite to Amakasu. Then the staff, dressed as maids, served coffee.

This VIP room was also outfitted with game equipment such as a billiards table or darts. Visiting for the first time, the two girls looked around inquisitively, touching this and that.

"Your special visit fills me with honor and trepidation, Honored Uncle. I am truly overjoyed to be able to meet you here."

Soon after, the owner of the business, Lu Yinghua, arrived.

He was the young member in the core leadership of Hong Kong's Lu family. At the same time, this youth was also the direct disciple of the demonic cult leader. A person of his stature could not possibly be stationed at this sort of cafe franchise all the time. Since Godou did not expect to see Lu Yinghua here, the pleasant surprise brought glimmers of joy to his eyes.

"That's so true, it's been a while."

"Maybe half a month ago since the last time?"

Despite being a slender and handsome youth, Lu Yinghua happened to be an arrogant misogynist.

He greeted Yuri and Liliana indifferently as if deliberately avoiding eye contact with them. Godou could only smile wryly in response to his unchanging arrogance and obstinacy.

"By the way, Liliana-san, sources from Italy report that a certain Devil King is undertaking some kind of suspicious project."

"How informed of you, Amakasu Touma."

Answering Amakasu, Liliana sighed. Yuri widened her eyes.

"Devil King... In other words, Sir Salvatore?"

"Yes, a few days ago, Sir Salvatore sent out summons to the prestigious associations in northern Italy. This time it is for participation in a 'divine beast hunt' in Tuscany."

The sixth Campione, Salvatore Doni, belonged to Italy.

"By hunt, he means hunting down a prey similar to my boar?"

Hearing something unexpected from Liliana, Godou blinked.

"It apparently lurks in the mountainous area in the region of Tuscany. After receiving pleas to help slay the beast, Sir Salvatore seemed uninterested in an opponent on the likes of a divine beast —"

"So he thought up this stupid plan instead?"

Liliana explained with a gloomy expression. Godou was astounded. As expected of an idiot who could not be handled by conventional means.

On the other hand, Lu Yinghua, who had been listening with a bored expression, slowly spoke up:

"Speaking of Sir Salvatore... He is apparently searching for a certain young woman in Italy."

"You're saying Doni is looking for someone?"

Hearing this unexpected news from Italy, Godou was surprised again.

On the other hand, Liliana, who belonged to a Milanese magic association, was inclining her head in doubt.

"I did not hear anything about this from the [Bronze Black Cross]."

"Oh my, well, the Italian king actually has an acquaintance in Rome's Chinatown. His Majesty sometimes relies on him for intelligence gathering and underground jobs that must be performed covertly."

Lu Yinghua answered readily with a shrug.

"The Lu family has relatives over in Rome. Thanks to this connection, we sometimes receive information from that person."

"Sir Salvatore and the Chinese syndicates!?"

Syndicates were a term used for Chinese secret associations. Liliana was dumbfounded to hear this unexpected news.

Come to think of it—Godou remembered. Despite giving off the impression of someone clearly not diligent in gathering intelligence, Salvatore Doni was surprisingly informed.

Probably because she recalled related information, Liliana nodded.

"Sir Salvatore became a godslayer four years ago. Roughly at that time, he was hired as a bodyguard by antique dealers of Chinese ethnicity, which led to the incident of his visit to Turkey. Could it be a relationship forged from that time?"

"Looks like it. Since those guys engage in the dangerous field of grave robbery, they would want to have bodyguards."

Yinghua shrugged with a cursory answer.

"Thanks to that incident, that kind of person was born... Seriously, give me a friggin' break."

"Could it be, Yinghua, that you've actually met that guy Doni?"

Lu Yinghua had been speaking in a tone of voice as if he knew the idiot.

Godou's question brought forth an immediate nod from the demonic cult leader's direct disciple.

"Just once, a couple years ago. That was back when I was serving as Master's attendant."

"Come to think of it, Nee-san also knows Doni."

"Well, it was a most unfortunate encounter..."

Deliberately emphasizing unfortunate, this seemed to be a message straight from Yinghua's heart.

"Although it's really nothing to be proud of, I've personally met and even conversed with all seven Devil Kings of the present generation."

"That truly is... impossible to envy."

Amakasu commented with a profound sense of reality.

Very regrettably, Godou was also one of the seven. He had already met five of the other six. Speaking of which, what was the name of the final Campione he had yet to meet?

Liliana also seemed to be thinking of the same person. She turned to Lu Yinghua and asked:

"If you say seven, then that means you have met her as well? Madame Aisha who has lived in seclusion for a long time now, the most mysterious of the Campiones?"

"Ah... Yeah, how should I put this? She is a good person."

Recalling the past, Yinghua's gaze began to display exhaustion.

"We only spent half a day together. If I had to attend to her for three days, I'd rather serve Master for ten days instead."

"Someone even more troublesome than Nee-san, it's a bit hard to imagine..."

"Even someone like Marquis Voban seems to be quite versed in worldly matters and would visit hotels across Europe all year round..."

Godou was at a loss for words while Liliana was quite surprised .

The Campione with the worst personality flaws was probably Her Eminence Luo Hao.

Her eternal rival, the old Marquis of Eastern Europe, would still travel by train and plane like a normal person.

But that would be impossible for Luo Cuilian. Godou was convinced she might kill all the "lower beings" on the same flight and destroy the plane with a strike of her palm.

"Excuse me... I felt something when I heard about Sir Salvatore's affairs."

"What did you see, Mariya Yuri?"

"It was not to the level of seeing but just a feeling. This 'hunt' might perhaps be the starting point of something—"

That was Yuri's response to Liliana's query.

The Yamato Nadeshiko had remained in polite silence all this time, possibly because conversations about the rumors of Campiones inevitably led to badmouthing them. Hence, she probably kept silent to avoid making inappropriate statements.

However, Yuri, who possessed the clairvoyant ability of spirit vision, had just delivered an oracle.

Part 4

'I, Sir Salvatore's butler Andrea Rivera, hereby issue a gathering invitation to you sirs in the exalted name of my lord. A hunt shall be undertaken against the divine beast confirmed several days earlier, I look forward to your valor and gallantry, sirs—"

Reportedly, this "letter of summoning" was delivered to all of the Great Knights selected by Doni's butler.

Without exception, every single one of them belonged to a prestigious association in northern Italy.

"The gathering venue is Casentino Forest National Park in the Tuscany region."

Holding a copy of the letter of summoning in her hand, Erica spoke.

Not only Godou but also Yuri and Liliana had gathered at the Jounan Academy courtyard after school.

"Sir Salvatore apparently wanted to flee the country instead of fulfilling the request to fight the divine beast, even though that level of an opponent should be a piece of cake for him as a Campione."

Yuri's spirit vision had occurred the previous night.

After that, Godou had contacted Erica, who then obtained information from the Italian side.

"But strangely enough, as soon as he heard that the place was Casentino, Sir Salvatore's attitude changed completely, saying he will "standby in case of an emergency."

Liliana commented quizzically, for she had contacted Milan's [Bronze Black Cross] as well and obtained detailed information.

After listening to the knight's reports, Godou began to ponder.

"In other words, there's some kind of secret hidden in that place. .."

"Hey Godou, do you still remember? You've been there before."

"Eh, I have?"

As Godou reacted in surprise, Erica continued.

"Yeah, after your first duel with Sir Salvatore, didn't you visit Tuscany to slay a divine beast? That's the place, you know."

"...Oh! Come to think of it, that did actually happen."

Finally recalling, Godou nodded.

In his recollections, the incident was extremely troublesome, so his memories ended up quite vague.

"Based on the recent eyewitness accounts, it is speculated that this divine beast is the same as the last time's."

"That dinosaur thing reappeared!?"

"Coincidence, or not? For a divine beast to manifest twice in the same place, I find it extremely unnatural..."

Yuri's doubts were not unreasonable. Also, Godou recalled something else. In order to win Doni's wager to decide who was going to slay the divine beast, the scene that had occurred in the town of Siena—

"Speaking of which, that guy Doni really wanted to go there last time."

"Yes, regarding this incident, Sir Salvatore has acted incomprehensibly in many ways."

Erica concluded.

Godou fell into deep thought. Salvatore Doni was undoubtedly a fool. But he was a surprisingly powerful eccentric and possessed unprecedented initiative.

Even if insulting him as an idiot was acceptable, one could not underestimate him as a threat.

"Then let's investigate a little..."

Godou proposed softly and took out his cellphone.

The number he looked up was one he had entered a while ago, because Erica said it might come in handy some time. However, when it really came time for it to be useful—

Making an overseas call required performing a particular sequence of steps before dialing.

It was currently 3pm in Japan. Given the eight-hour time difference, it should be morning over on the other side.

'Ah, my friend and eternal rival, to think the day has finally arrived when you would contact me from your end. I am so happy , it's been a while.'

Salvatore Doni picked up after five rings, with a useless-sounding voice as always.

'It happens that my birthday is coming up and I was just thinking of inviting you to my party. Are you free next month?'

"Even if I were free, who would go all the way to Italy to attend a birthday party!?"

Godou responded gruffly to the other side's jest. How long ago was the last time he spoke to this guy?

Nevertheless, the conversation flowed naturally. Without any hindrance at all.

In actual fact, the two had only met a limited number of times. That said, Godou and Salvatore Doni's closeness did not change. Neither becoming more intimate nor more distant. To each other, they were the most familiar of kin—

Realizing this annoying truth, Godou frowned and changed the subject.

"Putting that aside, I have something to ask you, Salvatore Doni. "

'What do you want to ask?'

"For the 'hunt' that is going to be held in Italy, the location is the one I once fought a monster, right? You initially wanted to go there yourself especially."

'Eh, that's pretty informed of you.'

Doni laughed wryly in response to Godou cutting to the chase directly.

'However, well... Speaking of coincidence, this is perfect timing. Why don't you join in? I welcome you very much.'

Doni seemed to have started smiling with joy during the first half of his response.

Godou was certain. It was that foolish but definitely not frivolous smile, the one displayed only when the dark warrior was delighted, an acute and fearless smile.

For Doni, whose face was actually decent, only during these times did he actually give off a handsome impression.

"So you really do have some sort of motive behind this hunt."

'Nothing at all, it's just a game. Game, I repeat. But now that the game has started, look forward to it. It would serve as excellent insurance if you came too.'

"Insurance?"

'In case something happens, Godou, a duel against you would be quite delightful, wouldn't you agree?'

"Stop screwing around. As if anyone would play like that."

'As expected of you, Godou, quite the tsundere, aren't you?'

"Shut up and stop misunderstanding Japanese culture. Other than that, Salvatore Doni, you're searching for a certain woman?"

Godou dropped another bomb to end the fruitless exchanges.

Then Doni sighed.

'If even that is known, it must be a leak from the Chinese side. Then speaking of which, you're on pretty good terms with Her Eminence over there.'

"You also seem to be on pretty good terms with China town over there."

'Good enough, I suppose. Before I became a Campione, I was earning a living by doing bodyguard jobs there.'

That was when Salvatore Doni was still a Templar Knight fallen on hard times.

If it were Erica or Liliana, that was undoubtedly a "job" they would never do.

'I still keep in touch with them and receive news leaked from the industry. Sometimes they lend money. Sometimes they help do almost criminal things like kidnapping.'

"It's not 'almost,' okay? Kidnapping is completely criminal. Anyway, cut this out, back to the main topic."

After retorting against his ridiculous words, Godou went straight to the main topic.

Although Doni was a veritable fool, Godou did not expect him to answer honestly. However, Godou still hoped he might leak hints through slips of the tongue.

"You said it's a game, what is it exactly?"

'Isn't it no fun if I tell you now? Oh well, but since you took the effort to call me, I guess it's okay to talk a bit about it? Recently in fact, I started playing a game, one of those online games.'

"You're competent enough to use the internet? My view of you is completely revised."

'No no, you don't have to praise me. I left all the setting up to Andrea.'

"I take back what I said."

'Even in a virtual world where monsters are fought, I still play the game with a swordsman character. But it's so weak. I lose whenever I encounter slightly stronger monsters or other players.'

"I'm not really sure, but there aren't very many PvP games out there, right?"

'Apparently, the guy I played against was already the strongest dating back long ago. I completely couldn't defeat a guy who had devoted his life to a game. It really pissed me off.'

"Time spent on a game is different. It can't be helped."

This type of maniac would be called a waste of a human being. Doni apparently lost to him.

Completely unsympathetic, Godou remarked coldly:

"Stop making a fuss and go back to the real world. You won't lose on this side, right?"

'That won't satisfy me. As a result, I want to play a more exciting game, one that I can win.'

"....."

Was this why he wanted a 'divine beast hunt'?

Also, who was the woman Doni wanted to find? Putting all sorts of mysteries aside, it was unknown which of the two Campiones hung up first. No more words needed to be said by this point. Both sides naturally reached consensus.

Indeed. This was the type of person Salvatore Doni was. Despite his jovial appearance, he was a man who never cooperated with anyone. That was a line he absolutely would not cross. Particularly when he recognized the other person as a "formidable foe."

Then again, the Campione residing in England was the same. Capable of provoking an inexplicable sense of hostility in Kusanagi Godou, he was a maddening man that could not be ignored—

After the conversation ended, Godou already made his decision .

He would head to the scene next. It was most important to prepare for what was surely going to happen. Believing that there was no better plan than this, Godou motioned with his eyes to his companions.

Having been listening to the conversation just now, Erica, Yuri and Liliana nodded immediately.

The final examinations began the next day after the phone conversation with Doni.

Thanks to sufficient studying, Godou and his companions passed without any serious mistakes. Then the three-day long weekend in early February approached as the break after exams.

Calling out Seishuuin Ena who had entered the deep mountains for purification, preparations were complete.

Very soon, the exam break during the Valentine's period would arrive.

Kusanagi Godou and friends departed on a journey.

Chapter 3 - A Tumultuous Opening

Part 1

Florence was once known as the city of flowers.

It was currently the capital of the Tuscany region. During the medieval period, the Medici family ruled the city and led to its development into a leading center of the Renaissance.

"There are quite a few tourist attractions. The must-see sights includes palaces, churches, cathedrals, the Ponte Vecchio bridge over the Arno, and the Piazzale Michelangelo square overlooking the entire city..."

Watching Erica introduce the city like a tour guide, Liliana chimed in.

"Speaking of must-see, visiting the museums is also a good idea. You get to admire the works of great masters in history such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo."

"But I basically have no chance of seeing all this. Even though it's my second time here."

As the two girls introduced the sights fluently, Godou muttered softly to himself.

Everyone was currently sitting in the back seats of a black limousine.

The plane had arrived in Florence the previous night. After spending the night in the city, this car came to receive them in front of the hotel at noon the next day. Everything was arranged by the hosts.

The car was currently speeding its way across the Florentine countryside.

The destination was supposed to be one hour east of Florence.

Although Godou could have chosen to find some free time to go sightseeing, he decided against it in the end. It was impossible to predict what would happen next, so it would be prudent to conserve his energy. He also worried whether Yuri might collapse from exhaustion.

The limo's back seats were oriented opposite each other, so everyone was sitting face to face.

"When it's time to go home, I really hope to go sightseeing for a day or so."

"That's probably wishful thinking."

Seishuuin Ena was the one who interrupted Godou's mutterings .

After the trip to Malaysia, this was another overseas expedition. Consequently, Ena was dressed casually instead of her usual uniform. Her attire consisted of a checkered shirt, a black flounced skirt and leggings.

"After all, Your Majesty is going to cause another major incident on this journey. A trip with time to spare is definitely not gonna happen!"

"The future is not set, don't go asserting so strongly, Seishuuin..."

"Although what's gonna happen is unknown, don't forget that Italy's king is over there as well. Things cannot possibly end well."

Casually ignoring Godou's displeased protests, the Hime-Miko of the Sword smiled as she spoke.

Even Liliana and Erica nodded in agreement.

"Indeed. When two Campiones meet up, something will definitely happen."

"Her Eminence Luo Hao and Godou. Prince Alec and Godou. All encounters so far have followed the same mold. What remains are only the questions of whether Godou's presence spells fortune or disaster and who is going to be affected."

"W-Wait a minute. I came for the purpose of monitoring that guy Doni, okay!"

Feeling compelled to object to the girls' preconceptions, Godou interrupted.

Having said nothing so far, Mariya Yuri cast him a glance as though she wanted to say something.

"What is it, Mariya?"

"Oh nothing. Of course, precautions against Sir Salvatore goes without saying, but I believe that the saying, 'to go for the wool and come back shorn,' often applies to you, Godou-san."

"G-Going for the wool?"

"Yes. In terms of pouring fuel on the fires of conflict, your accomplishments are no inferior to Sir Salvatore in any way, Godou-san."

The graceful Hime-Miko expressed her opinion humbly.

"While taking up a monitoring role, Godou-san, you may end up inciting new commotions instead..."

"Mariya, you're saying you believe in that possibility!?"

"Yes."

Hearing her instantly answer in the affirmative, Godou went " Guh" and could not find words to answer.

Furthermore, the other girls were nodding away vigorously in agreement!

"Wait a minute! Saying that I'm equal to that guy or whatever, I definitely cannot believe that!"

"Godou. Could you please review everything you've done so far and say that again with a straight face?"

"Ah, uh..."

He tried reviewing the past. Then Godou amended part of his statement.

"Even so, it's still not to the level of equals. At most maybe three quarters or so..."

"See, since there is 75%, it means you are confident that you have a fighting chance of victory."

"If you round it, the result is a similar number."

"In terms of problematic behavior during everyday life, Sir Salvatore wins hands down. But speaking of explosive power in the heat of the moment, I find Kusanagi Godou to be superior instead... Hence, equals after all."

Erica jumped on Godou's slip of the tongue and even Ena and Liliana followed suit.

"Godou-san, please pay attention and try to prevent this from happening. We will do our best to help too..."

Seeing as even Yuri, the most rational one, said this, Godou could not muster any protests.

Dejectedly, he bowed his head.

While they conversed, the car continued to make its way through Tuscany's agricultural scenery.

The surroundings were all endless plains and farmland with gently rolling hills scattered throughout.

During springtime, the grass, leaves and budding shoots of greenery would bring a dash of vivid color to the lands. However, the current season was winter. The land's greenery was drab, mixed with the brown color of many dead leaves.

Also, the peaks of the mountain range in the distance gradually entered into view.

They had now entered the mountains. Then there was snow. The color covering the land switched from mottled green and brown of dead leaves to the pure whiteness of snow.

After that, the car finished its hour-long journey.

Godou's group had finally reached their destination, a sturdy castle built from stone.

This medieval castle had been converted into an old castle hotel. It was supposedly rented to serve as the headquarters for the " divine beast hunt."

In the silvery world around the hotel, a great amount of snow had accumulated.

Although the place was definitely not a land of snow, there had just been snowfall on the day before. On the other hand, today's weather was bright and sunny. The dazzling blue sky stretched endlessly above.

"Hey Godou."

"It's been a while."

The two Devil Kings were reunited in the lobby of the old castle hotel. However, everything that needed saying had already been covered in the phone call a few days ago.

Doni laughed cheerfully while Godou gave a simple greeting with a poker face.

"Well, isn't this truly delightful? If possible, I really want another duel with you."

"Yeah, keep saying that and you'll find yourself in quite a fix."

After this brief exchange, Doni headed over towards the corridor while Godou went to look for another acquaintance.

The one he needed to talk to was not the "King of Swords" but the organizer. Luckily, Andrea Rivera was present in the lobby and approached Godou as soon as he saw him.

"We have already sent out several knights. They are currently searching for the divine beast in question."

Through a simple conversation, Rivera informed Godou of the incident.

It was said that whenever magi and knights were summoned in the name of Salvatore Doni the leader of the Southern European world of magic, his butler, Rivera, managed these organizations on behalf of his irresponsible master.

Very likely, Rivera was the busiest person in the entire castle.

"Based on the reports so far, we can tell that the target is essentially mild-mannered. However, its outbursts of violent aggression mean that we cannot leave it alone."

"Violent aggression huh? That thing I fought last time seemed quite timid."

"I have heard of it too. Perhaps because it became used to it—The fear towards a Campione, already carved deeply in the core of its being."

In response to Rivera's ominous news, Godou posed a question.

"By the way, Doni seems to have some kind of motive behind this hunt, do you happen to know about it?"

"It's very unfortunate, but I do not know what that idi—my lord is thinking. He seems to be hiding something from me and secretly making plans... But just for the sake of caution, I already have surveillance arranged."

Irreverence and insolence was packaged into serious and sincere words.

Having displayed this amazing skill, Rivera took a light bow.

"Food and drinks have been prepared in the hall over there. Please make your way there and relax for now."

He really must be quite busy. Rivera left as soon as he finished speaking.

Nodding to his four companions, Godou headed towards the location indicated.

The space was once the castle's great hall. A buffet was already prepared. Even though it was not even two in the afternoon, the tables were lined with wine and beer.

In any case, it was a buffet party.

As the chair of the event, "the highest ranking person" was currently standing on stage.

"Uh, everyone. Thank you all for answering my summons here (rustling) I, Salvatore Doni, express my sincere thanks to everyone's courage and spirit of sacrifice... (rustling)."

On stage, Doni was openly reading out the contents of a piece of notebook paper.

He was still dressed casually in a long-sleeved, unbuttoned shirt and cotton pants.

The paper's rustling was being amplified by the microphone.

"Although there are still many thanks I'd like to express... Let's end them right here."

Doni suddenly threw away the piece of paper and ended his speech.

"Etc etc. I hope everyone can enjoy their brief time here. That's it !"

Swiftly, he went off the stage and retreated into the depths.

Godou was marveling at the discovery that Doni was capable of delivering speeches, but seeing this, he understood. "Ah I see."

"To think he dared do that so openly."

"For the people present, I'm sure everyone is already used to this type of behavior from Sir Salvatore."

Godou turned his gaze towards "the people present" that Erica mentioned.

Roughly twenty people were gathered in the great hall. Their age range was quite broad, covering people in the twenties up to their forties. All men without exception. These were reportedly the Great Knights who had responded to Doni's summons.

Most of them were wearing suits but a few were dressed casually in jackets over t-shirts.

"Since this is a gathering of Italian knights, Ena originally expected people with getups like matadors or that phantom of the op-something or other. How disappointing."

"Do not confuse this with the Carnival of Venice, Seishuuin Ena. Besides, there is probably no need to get dressed up here."

"Indeed... We are not much better ourselves."

Looking at the attire of their own group, Yuri nodded.

Yuri was wearing a black, silken one-piece dress, stylistically much more mature than her usual daily wear. Erica and Liliana were wearing black leather pants along with the usual capes they used in battle.

Ena had not changed. Godou was also dressed in an ordinary shirt with jeans.

"Then I shall take my leave, Godou, for I have preparations to make."

"Yeah, thanks."

Godou nodded and Erica went through the crowd in the party.

She was making her way to the great hall's exit. However, she suddenly stopped because along the way, she ran into someone she knew. After a brief amiable exchange, she continued on her way.

"Her social circles really are quite broad."

Godou felt impressed but he also left his seat to call on an acquaintance.

He was the magic association [Capital of Lilies]'s premier knight whom Godou had met at the Roman Colosseum last time. Godou had been greeted by him earlier during their reunion in the great hall.

This prompted the successive arrival of Great Knights greeting Godou in their first encounter.

Naturally, this was not because of the name of Kusanagi Godou but his Campione title. Once this wave of greetings subsided, someone not in a suit, a hotel attendant, came to Godou's side.

His whispers informed Godou that his companion was calling for him. Erica's preparations were apparently ready.

Taking his leave from the other girls, Godou followed the attendant.

He was led to a room inside the ancient castle.

As soon as he entered the room, Godou was welcomed by someone he knew.

"It has truly been quite a while, Godou. I am very happy to see you again."

For Godou, this was the first greeting he received in this hotel that was filled with cordial affection.

Reuniting after nine months, the man instantly walked over as soon as he saw Godou's face and patted him on the shoulder.

"Or perhaps, in light of your recent leaps and bounds in growth, you may find this familiar tone of voice disrespectful? Should that be the case, please allow me to correct myself instantly."

"No, this is good. More accurately, it'd be a great help if you keep things this way."

The one who elicited a wry smile from Godou with a friendly teasing joke was Paolo Blandelli, dressed in an impeccable suit. Being the busy man he was, Paolo had made his late arrival only just now.

Naturally, his niece Erica was present as well.

This was the room she had reserved beforehand for Godou and Paolo to hold a detailed discussion.

There was also another person in the room, a woman whom Godou did not recognize. Her long black hair tied in a ponytail, she was a beautiful woman with a lightly tanned complexion.

She was apparently of Latin birth with a strong-minded spirit visible in her countenance.

"A pleasure to meet you, Your Highness the seventh Campione.
"

The Latin beauty spoke with a slightly husky voice and smiled fearlessly.

"My title is much more famous than my real name. Everyone always calls me with that whatever 'Raffaello' name. Let's get along from now on."

"This is the esteemed Saint Raffaello. She is one of the Templar Knights holding the rank of Paladino."

Erica added as a supplementary explanation.

"Sir Salvatore trained in swordsmanship under her in the past—She is his master."

"Eh? That guy actually has a master?"

Godou was dumbfounded by this unexpected revelation.

Part 2

"Master whatever, it only lasted a month actually. The brat simply disappeared on his own afterwards. He was already an incredible moron back then, but he's risen to new heights now."

Criticizing Doni harshly without reserve, Saint Raffaello conversed with Godou with much bravado.

She seemed to be a woman who was the polar opposite of serious.

Saint Raffaello, Paolo, Erica and Godou took seats around a table and began to discuss.

"I am the one who presumptuously invited Saint Raffaello here. "

Presumably planning on leading the conversation, Paolo opened the discussion.

"This is because, excluding Sir Salvatore, she is Europe's strongest knight. At the same time, she is also one of the rare few who knows Madame Aisha."

"Aisha? I recall something about her being one of my peers?"

"Yes. The Alexandrian godslayer. The Mysterious Queen of Caves. Renowned as the Eternal Beauty, Madame Aisha. Indeed, that's the one."

Erica swiftly explained to dispel Godou's confusion.

Despite her eloquence, the Diavolo Rosso seemed to be taking only a support role in this discussion. That was probably in deference to the status of her seniors, Saint Raffaello and her uncle.

"Regarding this incident, we of the [Copper Black Cross] have also undertaken investigations in many directions. For example, why is Sir Salvatore so obsessed with this particular land?"

Paolo resumed.

"In the end, one thing was made clear. During spring of last year, three months before you visited Tuscany, a woman resembling Madame Aisha was allegedly sighted in these lands."

"So basically, the woman Doni is looking for is—"

"Yes. He should be looking for Madame Aisha, no mistake about it."

Hearing Paolo's answer, Godou tried to imagine.

He tried to imagine what might be going through the mind of Salvatore Doni.

"So basically, that idiot is hoping for the seeds of conflict to break out in a land where a divine beast and a Campione are lurking?"

"Fair enough. Perhaps the trick may have been discovered already."

After making some kind of reference, Saint Raffaello turned to Erica:

"Do you know what kinds of authorities Aisha-neesan possesses ?"

"No, like Her Eminence Luo Hao, Madame Aisha is a very mysterious Campione. I do not have any details of her appearance or powers. However, she seems to have the kind of authority that preserves eternal youth and beauty...?"

"It's an authority nowhere near as simple as eternal youth."

Saint Raffaello remarked with a sigh.

"Hers is an authority for creating holes. To create 'holes' in the ground which connect to 'another world.' However, the holes are left intact until Nee-san returns."

"By another world—you mean the Astral Plane?"

This was the name of the otherworld Godou had visited a number of times.

Hearing Godou bringing up that name, Saint Raffaello smiled wryly.

"It'd be wonderful if it were limited to that. But no, in addition to that place, even more worlds can be reached. More than anyone else, Aisha-neesan is the most troublesome Campione among the seven."

"She is number one among us?"

"Yes. Although Voban-niisan and Luo Hao-neesan are very talented at causing trouble for others, Aisha-neesan is still top class . She is the only one I absolutely do not wish to hang around."

Saint Raffaello spoke as if reminiscing past memories with deep feeling.

Come to think of it, Lu Yinghua had given a similar description once. As Godou recalled Lu Yinghua's words, Paolo nodded at him and spoke:

"Regarding the Madame, I have only heard rumors and never spoke to her, which is why I invited Saint Raffaello over specifically."

"However, I really don't want to reveal too much about her."

"Why is that?"

Saint Raffaello answered Godou's question with a depressed expression.

"Most people would have trouble sleeping peacefully at night ever again if they heard the full story. This is a dangerous matter that could change the world completely. In actual fact, it has already started."

Change the world completely.

Even if these words were an exaggeration, it was still a troubling description.

"Here's my opinion on the current situation. One of Aisha-neesan's holes must have opened up somewhere in this land . My guess is that the divine beast came through from there."

Godou was dumbstruck by Saint Raffaello's speculation.

"Oh, it's just you girls? Godou's not here."

"Sir Salvatore!"

Yuri jumped with surprise at the sudden voice.

Inside the great hall being used as the venue of the impromptu party, Yuri was in a corner with Liliana and Ena. Salvatore Doni had walked over with a glass of beer in his hand.

"Godou-san and Erica-san as well as her uncle are currently talking in another room..."

Yuri replied in terror.

She had first met Doni on the island of Sardinia. Last time, he had tied her up on sight with a straw rope. Having exchanged few words, they could not be described as familiar.

"You still seem quite insistent on Kusanagi Godou as your opponent, Sir Salvatore."

Liliana interjected. Among the girls here, she was the one who had had the most contact with Doni.

Not to the level of rudeness, but with subtle sarcasm, Liliana remarked:

"The Salvatore Doni I know is not someone I would expect to engage in idle chitchat on this type of occasion."

"Hey hey, even someone like me would still say hi to people I know."

As Doni smiled, a lively melody was heard from his pants. A cellphone ringtone.

Going "Excuse me for a sec," he took out the cellphone and took the call.

"Yes... Yes. Eh, that's really huge news. How unexpectedly early . Ah, sorry sorry. Of course, I'm absolutely serious. Make preparations immediately."

Salvatore Doni grinned as he conversed happily.

For some reason, Yuri felt uncomfortable and hunched herself tightly.

From the blonde Campione, she could feel something akin to fireworks about to be fired off.

Meanwhile, Doni hastily ended the call and declared with a wide grin:

"Well then, I'll be off. Say hi to Godou for me!"

The pace of his departure was unusually swift.

Once Doni was completely out of view, Ena suddenly asked:

"What's the matter, Yuri?"

"Ah yes. For some reason, I felt an ominous aura from Sir Salvatore's body just now..."

Hearing this reply, the Hime-Miko of the Sword went "Hmm" and began to ponder.

"The person on the other side in that phone call sounded like the man called Rivera who was talking to His Majesty earlier."

Seishuuin Ena's five senses, including hearing, were as sharp as a wild beast's.

She was indeed capable of hearing the other speaker's voice. Yuri nodded without hesitation.

"So, Rivera-san reported that something was approaching the hotel so be careful, and something about needing increased security..."

"From the way he looked, Sir Salvatore seemed completely unconcerned..."

Ena and Yuri murmured. Liliana hugged her shoulders and began to contemplate.

"Could it be that Sir Salvatore already has some sort of nefarious plan in motion? Intending to enjoy a chaotic situation once everyone arrived..."

"Does Sir Salvatore play pranks of that level?"

Yuri's question was answered by Liliana nodding with a serious expression.

"He probably did not think up a plan ahead of time. However, he would adapt to the situation and flexibly use whatever is available. Sir Salvatore is a very cunning man."

"Is that really so? It is a little surprising..."

"I understand how you feel. In fact, I occasionally feel like calling him an idiot directly."

"L-Liliana-san, you cannot use that kind of word..."

"However, he does resemble a slow-witted person."

"Not you as well, Ena-san, this is unacceptable!"

"No no, because Ena is about the same, so it feels like kinship."

"On the other hand, Seishuuin Ena, you were inexplicably quiet when Sir Salvatore approached just now. It felt as though you were avoiding him..."

Liliana wondered incredulously. In fact, Yuri had also felt the same.

The normally fearless premier Hime-Miko had acted as if she were avoiding Salvatore Doni's gaze, as if she were trying to hide behind Yuri.

"Ah... Actually, Ena is not very good at dealing with that kind of 'enlightened' person."

"'Enlightened'!?"

"Speaking of which, King Salvatore has disappeared again."

This description did not resemble something the carefree child of nature would say. It was completely shocking to hear her using the word "enlightened."

Ignoring Yuri and Liliana's surprise, Ena surveyed the party venue and reported.

"He probably left already."

"Although what he is planning is unclear, we cannot leave him be... Let us go on a brief search. Come with me, Seishuuin Ena."

Liliana spoke thoughtfully. Taking over as the leader in times like these, this was a role reserved for none other but her as Kusanagi Godou's adjutant.

"Even if I carelessly release the [Witch's Eye], Sir Salvatore would probably dispel it. Let us first find his location then tail him."

"Sounds very fun. Of course, Ena will come along."

The witchcraft of projecting sight through the air did not work against Salvatore Doni apparently.

However, Liliana and Ena were both highly agile with keen sight. Given these two, they should be able to investigate through tracking and tailing.

"Take care, you two!"

Naturally, given her lack of athleticism, Yuri could only see them off.

After Liliana and Ena left the venue, Yuri waited alone for her friends to return. She was surrounded by lively people engaged in the party but there was not a single person she knew.

Taking a break from the party and leaving the great hall, Yuri came to the corridor.

As soon as she sat down on a sofa against the wall and exhaled —

"Sir Andrea's report has arrived. A divine beast seems to be approaching."

"A knight sent out to scout ended up discovered by the divine beast instead, which is now attacking. The other scouts are currently fleeing back as fast as they can. Get ready to rescue them and counterattack!"

A number of knights were running along the old castle hotel's corridor, yelling reports at the people around them.

Yuri jumped in surprise. In any case, this place was going to turn into a battlefield soon. This was the report Salvatore Doni had received over the phone!

Furthermore, was the crisis situation of the divine beast's arrival going to be the impetus that sparks things off?

A clear image suddenly surfaced in Yuri's mind. Naturally, this was an oracle brought by spirit vision.

However, what it showed was—

"How could this be!? Where did you go, Godou-san!?"

Stunned, Yuri could not help but scream.

Part 3

In the lobby of the old castle hotel, Seishuuin Ena put on a white jacket.

Liliana also put on her usual blue and black cape. Since there was no time to waste, they limited their winter gear to that and exited the hotel.

Outside, the view was dominated by a world of silver—

Stepping on this thickly piled up snow, one would instantly sink deep into it.

However, Ena was the child of nature capable of running around in the deep mountains during harsh winters. Furthermore, she had also mastered the art of Monkey Flight which conferred extraordinary agility in martial arts.

Using this spell allowed her to walk over snow with great ease, leaving only a trail of light footprints.

"You're not one to fear snow, are you, Liliana-san?"

"I am neither used to nor challenged by snow. Never mind me, just hurry."

Born and raised in Milan, Liliana was not a heaven-favored child of nature like Ena.

On the other hand, she was a witch whose lightness of body allowed her to reach the domain of flight. As expected, she only left behind a faint trail of footprints over the snow as she ran quickly to follow Ena.

"Sir Salvatore doesn't seem to be in the hotel..."

"He really did go outside, right?"

Ena and Liliana looked out into the distance together.

The hotel was built on a hill at a slightly higher elevation. It offered an expansive, panoramic view of the surroundings.

If one had to mention man-made structures, there seemed to be a little town ten-odd kilometers ahead. The sparse vegetation in the surroundings consisted mainly of scattered cypress trees. Visibility was excellent from the vantage point of the hotel.

The pure white plain of snow extended all the way to the horizon.

The current time was well into the afternoon, although dusk was still quite some time away. There was a sunny winter sky without a cloud visible for miles. Under this clear and bright sky, Ena used the [Eagle Eyes] spell to enhance her vision.

Although Ena's eyesight was already excellent, using this wizardry allowed her to literally see on the level of [Eagle Eyes].

Using a bird of prey's eyesight, capable of seeking prey from several kilometers away, Ena carefully searched the snowy plain with its lack of obstructions—Finally, a figure was found.

"It'd be great if that's really King Salvatore..."

"Rare is the busybody who likes venturing out in this land of snow. I believe the chances are more than hopeful."

Nodding to each other, Ena and Liliana began to run towards the figure's direction.

Due to the excellent visibility, it should be quite easy for the target to discover them as well. For the sake of caution, Liliana invoked the witchcraft of [Concealment] to hide their figures.

This was a spell for concealing a person like camouflage.

"Come to think of it, you called Sir Salvatore an 'enlightened' person just now?"

While racing over the snow as if flying, Liliana asked.

"I believe that description does not match Sir Salvatore's personality."

"It's like this. That king looks as though he completely lacks desires and worldly thoughts. Like a baby, his mind feels empty."

"An empty mind. Is that what you meant by enlightened?"

"That's right. Enlightenment is attaining the level where one is released from all doubt and anxiety. The state where great wisdom is masqueraded as great foolishness. An empty mind without thoughts, as serene and clear as a polished mirror or still water. Getting rid of all thoughts from the mind, to be able to live leisurely in any situation. 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.'"

"I feel like I sort of get it but not completely..."

Chatting as they sprinted across the snow, the pair suddenly stopped talking. Voices could be heard, carried by the wind. The two girls halted simultaneously and listened.

'What on earth are you thinking, Sir!?' 'What's-your-face, hurry back to the venue! Report to Sir Andrea—Oof.' 'Guh.' 'Mhah.'

'Sorry, guys. I've sent you all to sleep painlessly. Forgive me, yo. "

Then there were no more voices. All Liliana and Ena could hear was the sound of the wind.

"...What's your take on this, Liliana-san?"

"...Sir Salvatore eliminated the surveillance team using physical force."

Reaching the same conclusion, the two girls nodded at each other.

Instead of running, the two girls walked towards the direction of the voices. They did so quietly and cautiously, as if holding their breath. After a brief walk, they were met with the scene amidst some cypress trees.

Three men lay face down on the snow while Salvatore Doni was standing around casually.

He was wearing a black coat with leather boots. Slung on his shoulder was the cylindrical case.

"Well then, I think it's almost time it arrived. What's gonna happen?"

Muttering to himself, Doni turned his gaze towards the girls' direction.

Ena immediately ducked and lay on the snow. Slender enough, Liliana hid behind a cypress tree.

However, this was worrying for nothing. Rather than looking at the two girls, Doni was gazing towards the old castle hotel. Then he smiled with joy. Following his gaze, Ena was surprised by the sight.

A "dinosaur" had appeared before the hotel, roughly seven meters in body length.

Its body seemed slender and agile. Massive, hooked claw, tough hind legs. Just as Godou and Erica had described, it was a black, carnivorous dinosaur.

Recent research had given rise to theories that this type of dinosaur was actually covered in feathers.

However, the divine beast before them was only covered in sturdy skin. Pitch-black like a raven, it stood in stark contrast against the background of pure white snow.

"Goody goody. While Rivera and the others have their hands full, one task is done."

Doni smiled with satisfaction and began running over the snow with movements as agile as a fox.

Towards the old castle—Not. He was going in the completely opposite direction.

"To think he ignored the divine beast's arrival. Where is Sir Salvatore going actually?"

"Let's pursue him. After all, His Majesty and Erica-san can handle things there."

"Indeed. Furthermore, Erica's uncle and Saint Raffaello are there too."

Ena quickly suggested and Liliana immediately nodded in agreement.

"That black thing appeared again!?"

"Yes. Pursuing the knights who were out scouting, it's currently approaching this place!"

Godou and Erica exited the old castle hotel together.

Just when they were listening to Saint Raffaello's exposition on Madame Aisha's authority that allowed travel to 'somewhere in another world,' Paolo's cellphone suddenly rang.

It was Andrea's report of the "approaching divine beast."

Also present, Saint Raffaello and Paolo Blandelli exchanged whispers with solemn expressions.

"Well, what did the idiot's chaperone say?"

"He can't contact the personnel in charge of monitoring Sir Salvatore. Since he is going to track down Sir Salvatore, he is passing all command over to me."

"Tsk. One after another, troublesome things arrive!"

Just as the quartet arrived at the hotel garden, they heard a strange roar.

SHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

Looking in the direction of the sound, Godou saw the black dinosaur he had not seen for nine months—Another face off against the agile seven-meter-long divine beast.

Its hind legs and hooked claws were massive as ever, bearing the appearance of *Deinonychus*.

This *Deinonychus* seemed to be more keen and nimble than its appearance suggested.

Climbing over the wall surrounding the old castle, it looked down at the hotel's confines.

Apparently, it had not yet noticed Kusanagi Godou's arrival and did not show any intent to flee. Godou was puzzled. Thanks to the vast amount of combat experience he had accumulated over the past nine months, he was able to notice a certain detail.

"That should be the divine beast... But it seems a bit small."

"Perhaps its true form is still hidden. Maybe it can suddenly enlarge in size."

Speaking of accumulating experience, the same went for Erica. The two nodded at each other.

Apart from Godou's group, there were also seven or eight Great Knights gathered in the garden.

They were the elite troops gathered by Doni's summons. Nevertheless, their eyes, gazing at the divine beast, were filled with fear and nervous tension.

Godou recalled what Erica's colleague had said.

Even for magi of Great Knight class, a battle against a divine beast was still a life-risking endeavor. Furthermore, their preparations in the current situation were far too insufficient. Godou immediately commanded.

"Tell them to stand down. I'll be that thing's opponent!"

"No. Before we elucidate Sir Salvatore's intentions, it would be best to avoid using Verethragna's incarnations. I'm present here, and so is my uncle and Saint Raffaello!"

The instant Erica answered, the lower hem of her cape began to flutter.

Next to her, the two Paladino also put on their battle attire as Italian knights—They summoned the capes known as the bandiera .

Saint Raffaello's cape was violet. On the other hand, Paolo Blandelli's cape in the rossonero colors of red and black, naturally.

The hems of their capes reached down much lower than Erica and Liliana's.

Then the violet knight summoned a one-meter-long claymore. The red Paladino conjured an oval shield on his left hand while a barbed lance appeared in his right.

"Although I have no intention of stealing the spotlight, standing back doing nothing hurts my pride!"

"Then let us take on the opening scene. Godou, since you're the main protagonist, wait until the climactic scene before entering the stage!"

Saint Raffaello glared fearlessly at the *Deinonychus*.

Delivering elaborate words, Paolo fully displayed his befitting qualities as Erica's uncle.

Meanwhile, the dinosaur-shaped divine beast opened its jaws wide and roared again.

SHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

Completely unfazed, the two Paladino leapt lightly and landed on the castle wall. They intended to intercept the '*Deinonychus* there.

"So, Godou, I'm off too!"

Erica also summoned the slender longsword, Cuore di Leone. Following her uncle, she jumped onto the castle wall.

Godou watched the knights' battle for now—

While he was staring at the trio's figures, someone suddenly tugged his arm. Looking back, Godou found the Hime-Miko standing right before him in a black dress. Mariya Yuri.

"Godou-san. I have something urgent to tell you...!"

While bearing quite a hesitant expression, Yuri made her appeal to him.

Part 4

The *Deinonychus* opened its jaws and spewed out multiple beams of lightning.

Standing on the castle wall, Saint Raffaello was in the direct line of fire. Normally, one would expect her to be blown away by the impact, dying instantly with burns covering a high proportion of her total body surface area.

Nevertheless, Saint Raffaello was protected by the violet light enveloped around her.

"Gaaaaah! O Saint John, I beseech you to grant me your protection!"

The female Paladino gritted her teeth and chanted spell words with all her might.

The violet light proceeded to brighten. Under this protection, Saint Raffaello managed to withstand the lightning attack without receiving any harm.

The violet light was the force field produced by Saint Raffaello invoking the secret ritual of [Smiting].

Erica and Liliana were also capable of using it—No, at their current level, they could only use the sacred privilege of extermination for short durations.

Next, the *Deinonychus* suddenly stopped spewing lightning.

Without warning, its deadly jaws aimed a bite at the female Paladino. However, the instant Saint Raffaello was about to be devoured—

The *Deinonychus* was struck in the face by a beam of red light.

Armed with his shield and lance, Paolo Blandelli had charged valiantly.

The sacred exterminator was flying at full speed, enveloped in red light. Protecting himself with the shield in his left hand, he charged straight at the *Deinonychus*' face —

This sudden attack sent the *Deinonychus* flying as if it had been struck by a giant's right straight punch.

Moreover, that was not the end of Paolo's attack. Aiming at the pitch-black head of the blown away *Deinonychus*—at its temples—he flew again to perform another charge.

This time, a red cross-shaped spell crest appeared on his lance tip as though poison had been applied onto it.

"O red cross... Turn into a wedge and pierce the enemy!"

Charging at the *Deinonychus*' head, Paolo made a thrust with his lance, accompanied by the chanting of spell words.

The instant the sharp tip of the lance and the red pentagram pierced its skin, the *Deinonychus* screamed.

GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

In that instant, sparks shot out from the *Deinonychus*' eyes, striking Paolo mid-charge. The beast was apparently using divine powers.

"Guu!"

Struck down onto the ground, Paolo promptly stood right back up.

The sacred exterminator's light remained a vivid crimson hue. His standing posture was a powerful sight. As a human, he also exuded a hero's mettle at the same time.

Saint Raffaello ran over to the valiant Paolo's side. The violet knight readied her claymore in a stance.

Reportedly, these two were top class masters in all of Europe, not just Italy.

Watching how the two fought, Godou noticed. Indeed, the stability they displayed in their usage of [Smiting] was different from that of Erica and Liliana.

Godou felt that with regard to instantaneous power output, there was an extremely wide gap in difference.

However, Paolo and Saint Raffaello's powerful presence and composure coupled with unshakable stability were things that Godou's knight companions did not possess. Although the current situation looked dire, in actual fact it was not.

Furthermore, Erica was on standby as the third combatant, ready to enter the fray any moment.

"Judging from the situation, I guess things are okay even if I don't join in..."

"Yes. For some reason, I feel that there will not be a problem even if you left this situation for those two to handle. Putting that aside, Godou-san, I really must hurry and inform you—"

"Oh sorry, Mariya. Please go on and tell me."

The old castle hotel was built using a medieval fortress as a base .

Although Godou had brought Yuri to a corner of the hotel garden to speak, he could not help but cast his attention towards the knights' battle with the divine beast.

"Very well. Before you and I part ways, Godou-san, I have things I must inform you no matter what."

Godou went "Eh?" and was rendered speechless by Yuri's words.

Parting ways with Yuri? There was no such plan at the moment. The only possibility Godou could think of was if Yuri was having health problems.

Back when Erica heard about the Hime-Miko's fainting collapse, this was what she said:

'...Extraordinary spirit vision and aptitude for psychic sensing. Yuri and Princess Alice are very similar users of spirit powers. Furthermore, the Princess' health is exceptionally frail because her body has trouble withstanding those astounding spirit powers.'

Erica had used London's bedridden Princess as an example to illustrate.

'Fortunately, Yuri's health problems are not that severe. Nevertheless, that only describes the current situation. I'd like to observe her condition a while longer, but without allowing her to overstrain herself in the mean time.'

'Speaking of the Princess, indeed they are quite similar.'

Liliana had also nodded in agreement with her longtime friend and rival.

'Strangely enough, Mariya Yuri has a similar lack of physical stamina. Perhaps it is a sign of a person's strong affinity to the blood of the divine ancestors they have inherited..."

Although there was no evidence, this theory sounded quite plausible.

In actual fact, before coming to Italy, Godou had agonized over whether to leave Yuri in Japan.

"Could it be, Mariya, you're not feeling well...!?"

"N-No. Nothing of that sort."

Godou could not help but raise his voice, causing Yuri to be taken aback with surprise.

Since Yuri seemed to be telling the truth, Godou was relieved. In that case, what did she mean by "parting ways"?

"Actually... I saw it a while earlier. We will be parting ways—Godou-san, you will be going to a faraway place to start a journey."

"I will start a journey? Where exactly?"

Yuri had apparently experienced a spirit vision.

Of course, Godou believed her completely but he was still quite baffled.

"I do not know. All I know is that it is a place where one cannot easily return from... Hence, before you set off, Godou-san, I would like to inform you first. Regarding the new power you have received, Godou-san."

"Power?"

"Yes. Recently, I keep getting the feeling that... A power residing in your body, Godou-san, shall sublime and take on a new form."

"....."

"I originally intended to keep silent until it was absolutely necessary to reveal it... However, Godou-san, you may come across danger during your journey. In order to prepare in advance, let me remove the seal here right now."

Troubling advice was being offered by Yuri, a prudent member of the common sense faction.

Surprised, Godou wanted to adhere to passivity and reject the proposal.

"That sounds like something dangerous. I'm fine even if I don't obtain it."

"No. I implore you to prepare yourself. In order to take my place because I can no longer watch over you by your side, I do wish to provide some assistance to you now at least."

"Mariya..."

"H-Hence. In order to unseal it, I must cast a spell on you."

Yuri lowered her gaze and bowed her head, whispering shyly.

However, despite the trouble the Hime-Miko was having in finding the right words, she still continued to speak in a stuttering manner.

"W-We will be parting ways very soon. If you say 'maybe next time' like you did to Ena-san in the past, you will very likely forget , Godou-san..."

Hearing her bring up the promise between Ena and himself, Godou groaned in anguish.

But with this, what the Hime-Miko was seeking had become perfectly clear.

"S-So. If you do not mind, it is imperative that we—"

"Mari—Yuri!"

Godou decided he would never live it down if she was forced to finish her sentence.

Furthermore, her bold words incited excitement in Godou's heart.

He immediately embraced Yuri and took her forcefully by the lips.

"Godou-san...!"

"I did say I have no wish for that kind of strange power, however, I—"

"V-Very well. Let us begin together."

Gazing into each other's eyes, exchanging passionate words, the two of them kissed again.

This time, they both extended their tongues simultaneously and kissed like a string instrument's bow and string. Two sets of lips

tightly pressed together, tongues caressing each other, saliva mixing together.

Then in Godou's mind, the image of a certain goddess surfaced.

"As expected of Uncle Paolo and Saint Raffaello. It looks like there's no need for me to enter the stage."

Erica murmured as she watched the two Paladinos fighting the divine beast valiantly.

In order to intervene at any opportunity, she had cast magic on Cuore di Leone, the magic sword of the lion, turning it into a pilum.

But judging from the current state of affairs, her assistance did not seem necessary.

Taking advantage of the moment when Saint Raffaello held the enemy's attention, exterminator Paolo charged, blasting the *Deinonychus* away from the old castle hotel where ordinary staff were still present.

Having secured the safety of the other personnel, the two Paladinos resumed the battle.

Paolo and Saint Raffaello did not attack over aggressively, instead choosing to dodge the divine beast's attacks again and again.

However, their blades would stab into the *Deinonychus*' vitals as soon as an opening appeared.

Consequently, the divine beast gradually weakened. Paolo and Saint Raffaello's position of advantage was unshakable.

However, they were not simply aiming for the enemy's defeat but also information concerning its nature. In case a battle against a similar divine beast was encountered again, they considered such a possibility—

"Lily, Ena-san and I, none of us are able to fight in this manner... Granted, these two hold the rank of Paladino, but their difference in level relative to us is all too clear to see."

If Erica and the girls were the ones fighting, they would surely be launching attacks nonstop instead.

In a fight against a divine beast, a single blunder could prove fatal. The risk of making such mistakes in a protracted battle increased as time dragged on.

Given that was the case, the best approach was to begin the battle with a full-out offensive to end things as quickly as possible.

However, such tactics were only possible with the support of her companions and Kusanagi Godou.

Erica and Liliana had only just grasped the basics of [Smiting]. They were still in training and could not be said to have truly attained the Paladino rank.

In any case, Erica observed the two Paladinos battling calmly.

"Eh!?"

Erica was shocked by the sudden transformation of the *Deinonychus*.

Its front limbs were originally much shorter and more slender than its tough hind legs. However, these small front limbs suddenly transformed into a pair of wings.

Covered with a thin membrane, a pair of wings similar to a bat's —

The *Deinonychus* had transformed into a black pterosaur. The size and length of its body remained the same. The beast still seemed rather agile.

"I can't believe it transformed!?"

"To think it was concealing this sort of power!"

As Saint Raffaello and Paolo watched in surprise, the pterosaur swept its tail at them.

Due to the protection conferred by the privilege of extermination, the two did not receive any significant injuries. However, the black pterosaur took this opportunity to flap its wings, taking to the skies.

Steadily rising in altitude, it flew towards the distant sky. It was trying to flee.

"Cuore di Leone!"

The instant she realized the enemy was escaping, Erica threw the magic sword she had already transformed into a pilum.

The pilum was already enchanted with magic for enhancing flight range and infused with the "spell words of resentment and despair."

Launched from the ground, the pilum turned into a flash of light, piercing the pterosaur's throat.

It worked. Suffering this fatal blow, the already wounded divine beast crashed back down into the ground.

The fallen black pterosaur turned into a carcass lying on the snow.

But as a supernatural creature, it was probably going to lose its form and dissipate before long.

"A divine beast capable of transforming between two forms... Indeed, it is no ordinary dinosaur after all."

Erica murmured as she looked down at the fallen divine beast.

Not only her but also Paolo and Saint Raffaello, and even Yuri and Godou were running over. The entire group was watching the divine beast's demise.

"If Godou fought it like last time, we probably never would have realized. Most likely, he would have defeated it immediately. "

"That which was born from bitter waters... The beast following its mother the serpent—"

Yuri suddenly whispered.

Judging from the blank tone of her voice, she must have received a spirit vision.

"Did you see something related to this divine beast? Is it really connected to a mother earth goddess from somewhere?"

"Impossible to know clearly. Really, I only saw a few things..."

Hearing Erica and Yuri's exchange, Saint Raffaello shrugged.

"Oh well, gods are not the only ones who can summon divine beasts anyway. Venerable divine artifacts, hidden sanctuaries, forbidden high-level magic, and the Campiones themselves are all possible candidates."

"Speaking of Campiones, where did Sir Salvatore run off to?"

"—Hmm?"

While listening to Paolo's wondering, Godou also heard other voices.

They were cries of 'Kusanagi Godou! Your Majesty!' Cries for help, carried by the wind from far away, calling for the protector. Godou listened intently.

Mixed with snowflakes, a gust of powerful wind was sweeping across the clear and sunny sky.

The voices in the wind was an incantation invoked by those seeking rescue from a desperate crisis.

"Wind... I can use the the [Wind] incarnation...?"

"Could it be Liliana-san and Ena-san!? They were supposed to be tracking down Sir Salvatore!"

"Let's head there immediately, Godou!"

Yuri and Erica were amazing.

As soon as they heard Godou muttering softly to himself, they immediately understood the situation.

However, Yuri only expended a slight amount of energy for psychic sensing in the ritual earlier. Was she tired? Her face did not look well. Godou did not want her to suffer too much strain. He immediately called out:

"Mariya, go and rest. Let's go, Erica!"

Picking up Erica in his arms, he invoked Verethragna's first incarnation.

The air underfoot began to stir, forming a vortex of wind, turning into a whirlwind. The power of instantaneous travel was manifesting.

Leaving behind Paolo and Saint Raffaello in their amazement, Godou and Erica flew away, riding upon the wind.

"Please be careful, Godou-san! I shall wait for you all to return safe and sound!"

The voice of Yuri praying for Kusanagi Godou's safe return could be heard.

"Should you not come back, I shall go find you! Absolutely without a doubt!"

Part 5

The forest in Casentino was covered by deep snow.

Since this had always been a mountainous area, the terrain was undulating with mountains and valleys everywhere.

Running across the snow, weaving through the treacherous terrain, Salvatore Doni's movements were as swift and agile as a fox or a snow leopard.

Apart from swordsmanship, he had also attained extraordinary mastery in other martial arts and physical techniques.

Given the case, if only his personality could be slightly more normal—That was a dream that all European magi shared.

"By the way, where is Sir Salvatore going, really?"

"For now, we've already passed over two mountains."

Liliana's fellow partner in pursuit, Seishuuin Ena, answered.

While maintaining a distance so that Doni would not discover them, the two girls pursued him as he ran swiftly.

This would have been impossible for ordinary people, but Liliana and Ena barely managed through the use of spells and agile movements. But actually, there was probably no problem even if they lost sight of Doni.

This was because he himself was following "some kind of trail."

The divine beast that was just sighted outside the old castle hotel—

The *Deinonychus* had apparently arrived by passing through these snowy mountains, leaving footprints on the snow. This trail was what Doni was currently following.

"He wants to find the divine beast's lair...?"

"Speaking of which, he does indeed look as though he is searching for something."

The dinosaur's footprints soon led Doni to a ravine.

Although the stream at the bottom of the ravine was tiny, this was actually the Arno river. Not too far downstream, it would widen into a large river as it flowed across the vast plains of Tuscany.

Taking a spring or summer stroll here by the side of a beautiful river was probably one of the greatest pleasures in life.

Doni's eyes began to shine when he arrived at this place. Liliana understood the reason behind his reaction, for she too could feel the divine aura distributed throughout this land, more abundant than most other places.

"The air here feels like it came from a venerable sacred mountain. Anyway."

Ena spoke up. The Hime-Miko who had been calm and composed was now getting nervous. She watched their target of pursuit with great wariness.

"There's an annoying feeling. The king over there looks as though he's up to mischief."

"You are most probably right. Whenever Sir Salvatore makes that kind of face, he almost always does something absurd."

Salvatore Doni's eyes were shining like a child's.

Ever since Liliana first encountered him when she was twelve, she had witnessed this look many times.

Starting with his duel against the heroic god Siegfried and continuing until the time when he sliced apart a mother earth goddess' stone pillar, each and every occasion was a troublesome incident without exception.

"We must find a way to stop him."

Steeling her determination, Liliana began to take action. Until now, she had been monitoring Doni from above without descending down the ravine. But now, she jumped down into the ravine with agility like a fairy's. Ena followed suit.

Standing face to face with Doni, Liliana spoke up:

"Sir Salvatore! What on earth are you planning to do?"

"Eh? You are Liliana Kranjcar and... Uh, that girl Godou brought along with the whatever name. You both followed me, huh."

Seeing Liliana and Ena, Doni began to grin.

"However, this happens to be perfect timing, yes? Could you help deliver a message to him? Tell him 'This is the game's starting point, so come here later if you want to play.'"

"This is omitting too much. Please explain clearly in proper sequence!"

Directed towards a Devil King, these words were rather rude.

However, Liliana was already quite used to dealing with Doni. It was imperative to avoid getting caught up in his ridiculous pace by making demands resolutely.

As expected, the frivolous Devil King went "sorry my bad" in response.

"Oh dear. The divine beast roaming this area looks like it came through a hole that leads somewhere."

"Hole—in other words, it is a corridor leading to another world."

"Yes, well said. I intend to go through that hole. Perhaps the world on the other side has many divine beasts and gods as their masters. I'd like to go on a bit of an adventure."

So this turned out to be the truth? Grinning to himself, Doni revealed his incredibly ludicrous intentions.

"This is going to be like playing an RPG, very cool, right? But playing by myself would be no fun at all, so I want Godou to play along with me."

"Which is why you followed the divine beast's footprints to this place... And you say a hole should exist somewhere."

"Excuse me, Your Majesty. May I interrupt a bit?"

As Liliana summed up in exasperation, Ena interjected from beside her.

"That hole probably isn't open to passage all the time. It should open only when certain conditions are met, right? Like on a full moon or at a certain time. Otherwise, the surrounding area would be filled with divine beasts."

Even though she was a carefree child of nature, Seishuuin Ena was also a talented girl well-versed in cultural and martial arts.

Finding her reasoning compelling, Liliana nodded in agreement .

This type of "journey to another world" should only be possible under specific conditions. This principle could be called common sense in the world of magic.

However, unfettered by the limitations of common sense, the blonde Campione laughed with joy.

"This is not a problem. I hold a trump card prepared just for this occasion."

"Trump card..."

Immediately, powerful divine energy surged out of Doni's body .

Realizing he was planning on using his authority, Liliana felt her body shake suddenly. She was informed by an oracle which had descended through spirit vision.

Perhaps this authority originated from a secret cult in ancient Greece?

"The god of wine and harvests... The god ruling over secret rituals of madness. Could it be Dionysus!?"[4]

"Heh. To think you would know this, how expected of you, Kranjcar."

Doni's smile changed in nature.

From the frivolous smile of a cheerful Latin man, it transformed into the smile of a Devil King intent on fulfilling his godslaying arrogance to the very end—

"Precisely because it's you, I entrust the message to you without worry. Help me give Andrea a shout as well. If you screw up, then Godou will really be in trouble."

"Seriously, what the heck is wrong with you—!"

Liliana sighed and looked up resolutely.

Even though he was an astoundingly irresponsible man, nothing could change the fact of his being a godslayer. The only ones capable of opposing him were gods or other godslayers. In that case—Liliana communicated to her companion with a glance.

"Ama no Murakumo! Please lend your power to Ena!"

Ena swiftly understood Liliana's message and immediately summoned the divine sword Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi to her right hand.

Liliana also called forth the magic sword Il Maestro in its saber form and readied her combat stance.

"Hohohoho. I am not offended by you girls, recklessly drawing your swords against me here."

Just as expected, Doni set the cylindrical case down from his shoulder.

Opening it, he took out a steel longsword. He held it with his dangling right hand, entering an undisciplined but incomparably dangerous stance.

"Don't worry. I'll try my best not to hurt you."

In the instant they faced off against the bragging Campione, Liliana and Ena cried out:

"Kusanagi Godou! Here is an enemy that only you can handle. Please come here immediately!"

"Your Majesty! Hurry over and help Ena and Liliana-san!"

In response to their cries, the wind began to stir, strengthening to become a whirlwind, forming a tornado in no time.

With Erica Blandelli held in his embrace, her arms around his neck, Kusanagi Godou appeared in the eye of the rampaging storm .

In this manner, Kusanagi Godou and Erica were teleported instantaneously.

They had arrived at a ravine somewhere. A narrow stream was surrounded by precipitous cliffs on both sides. Standing at the bottom of the ravine were the trio, Doni, Liliana and Ena, wielding their swords respectively.

As soon as she saw Godou arrive, the silver-haired knight spoke :

"Kusanagi Godou. As always, Sir Salvatore is the culprit behind the whole incident. You must stop him as quickly as possible!"

"Yes. Well, it's already quite clear from this sight. Seriously."

For an instant, Godou smiled wryly in response to Liliana's concise report.

Then he tensed his expression and glared at Salvatore Doni.

The handsome man was displaying an acute expression in a rare moment. This was evidence that the frivolous fool was about to get serious.

"You're finally doing something stupid again, aren't you? Salvatore Doni!"

"Your sudden arrival is quite unexpected, Godou. But it's already too late."

Powerful divine energy was pouring out of Doni's body as he stood there nonchalantly.

He was preparing to use some kind of authority. Was it really going to be that of the magic sword? —Just as Godou readied his stance, Erica suddenly cried out in alarm from beside him.

"Godou, look at that!"

The blonde maiden pointed at a precipitous cliff.

On the opposite shore of the Arno river, roughly 40m away from their current position, a cave had opened up at some indiscernible time earlier—No.

More accurately, it was an opening that resembled a "cave." Its interior was filled with complete darkness.

"I see. This is the 'hole leading to another realm that is not the current world.'"

"Leading to another realm...? Could it be one of those things made by that Aisha person!?"

"Oh, you were investigating the Madame too? Well then, this is perfect. If you don't mind, why don't we set off to the world on the other side together?"

As Godou watched in horror, Doni winked at him casually.

"I originally intended to leave you a message, asking you to catch up to me afterwards. Let's set off together on an adventure, to engage in wars to conquer kingdoms."

"Enough with the jokes, as if anyone would want to do that! Seishuuin, lend me a hand!"

Why would Madame Aisha's lingering authority suddenly activate?

Casting this question aside for now, Godou called out to the one who shared ownership of his "partner."

As expected of Ena, she quickly nodded in understanding and raised Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi up high in her hand.

Godou immediately issued orders.

"Ama no Murakumo, go absorb that hole's energy! Hurry!"

The jet-black divine sword possessed the trait of absorbing magical power and divine authorities. This was what Godou commanded.

Although he had no idea how much of an effect it would produce, the more the hole's power weakened the better. Hence, Godou poured magical power into his partner the divine sword. Next, provided Ena kept it under control—

"Eh? Ama no Murakumo... Be obedient!?"

However, the Hime-Miko of the Sword screamed with a surprised expression.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was slowly vibrating. Furthermore, blue-white fire was appearing from the jet-black blade like a flame haze, flickering violently.

"S-So hot!"

Even Ena was unable to endure and she had to drop Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

Burning with blue-white flames, the divine sword fell, stabbing into the ground of the riverbank. Then Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi lost physical form and disappeared.

What transpired was very similar to the sight of a rider being thrown off by an untamed horse.

"W-What happened...?"

"O priestesses of Bacchus—Summon the divine child. Rendered drunk by the violent god's wine, home abandoned, wandering in the mountains. Worship and serve us gods!"

As Godou watched, troubled, Doni chanted spell words.

Godou felt his entire body become scorching hot. The great amount of magical power stored in a Campione's body had turned ferocious and started to rampage.

In the next instant, the air made a rumbling noise and began to blow strongly.

It was a terrifying gale, blowing towards the "hole" in the cliff.

Godou discovered it. The hole was producing a force of universal attraction that could not be ignored—gravity.

This force had turned the air in the ravine into strong wind that rushed into the "hole." It was sucking in stones of various sizes from the riverbank as well as the snow accumulated on the ground !

Even Godou found himself almost being sucked away, but he managed to resist it.

"The hole sucks in everything in the surroundings...!?"

"I-It's going out of control in exactly the right way. Very good, very good."

Going out of control!? Godou jumped in fright. Ama no Murakumo's abnormal behavior as well as the abnormal gravity suddenly produced by the "hole"... Could they all be...

"Hohohoho. You see, just now I used an authority that causes all mystical powers to strengthen or activate, making them go out of control. Even as the user, I cannot control my own authority."

"W-Wait a sec! What the heck is with this kind of self-destruct skill!?"

Salvatore Doni's fourth authority had been a mystery until now.

Godou was shocked to learn of its true nature.

Although he scolded Doni for using a self-destruct skill, Godou immediately realized one thing. If used appropriately, this type of ability could very well serve as an ultimate trump card.

It was said that this man had sharply honed his swordsmanship .

Hence, no matter how unreliable his authorities were, Doni's swordsmanship would never fail to obey his own will.

In a situation where divine power and magic were in an ambiguous state, Cult Leader Luo Hao and a man like Doni would find themselves in a particularly advantageous position—

"Godou, I am setting off now. If possible, you should follow as well. An adventurous journey undertaken by the two of us will definitely be very fun!"

Doni smiled and relaxed all the power in his body.

Next, he was sucked into Madame Aisha's "hole" and disappeared into the darkness.

"Your Majesty!"

"Kusanagi Godou!"

Ena and Liliana bent down, lowering their center of gravity to resist the attractive force, and made their way towards Godou.

"Godou, we'll all be caught by that power if this continues... Kyah!"

Halfway through her sentence, Erica screamed briefly.

The irresistible force of attraction strengthened all at once, finally lifting the Diavolo Rosso's slender body into the air. Not only her but Godou, Ena and Liliana all suffered the same fate.

"Uwah!?" "I-I'm being pulled towards it!" "Guh—!"

Just as the quartet were about to be sucked into the darkness—

Liliana alone held the last resort.

"O Goddess Artemis, grant us wings of flight!"

She intended to use her prided flight magic to take everyone to safety. The usual blue light was just about to envelope the four of them. However—

"Waaaaaaah!?"

Liliana screamed loudly, for she was the only one enveloped in blue light.

With that, she was flown over to the distant sky. Even a witch's flight magic could not escape the lingering effects of Doni's [Curse of Rampage].

Left behind, Godou, Erica and Ena, the three of them were sucked into the "hole" together.

Come to think of it, the title of the [Mysterious Queen of Caves] stemmed precisely from this. That was what the violet Paladino had mentioned...

Only now did Godou recall that fact.

Chapter 4 - Devil Kings in Yonder Lands

Part 1

They were sucked into a hole leading to somewhere not of this world.

By the time they came to their senses, Godou and company were floating amidst darkness. This was not night time. Neither was there a starry sky overhead. Only infinite darkness stretched endlessly beyond. However, there was a single light source.

In the distance ahead was a white dot of light that kept flashing like a bright star in the sky at night.

Relying on this light, Godou was able to find his companions using his excellent night vision.

"Is everyone okay?"

"Yeah, no problems. No injuries whatsoever."

"Me too. It's really quite fortunate that we didn't get separated."

Ena and Erica's voices replied. They were roughly two or three meters away.

However, the silver-haired knight did not seem to be present.

"It looked like Liliana-san flew away elsewhere."

"I don't know if it's a blessing or a curse, but it looks like she wasn't sucked into here. Oh well, I believe she shouldn't have any trouble reaching safety, being Liliana after all. So there's no need to worry."

Erica immediately answered Ena.

In the next instant, Godou and the two girls found their bodies beginning to move, drawn by the distant light ahead.

The trio was approaching the light at a rate similar to jogging speed.

They were floating in a manner akin to weightlessness in space.

With nothing to grab or step onto, it was impossible to resist even if they wanted to.

"Could this be one of those 'corridors' that Saint Raffaello mentioned...?"

"A corridor to another world, left behind by Madame Aisha. I never would have expected to experience it for myself."

"Eh? You two know what this is? Please tell Ena in detail, come on?"

"Let's save talking about her until later, okay? Besides, I'm not really in the mood to be chatting in this kind of place, let's just wait obediently for us to be delivered over there."

After handling Ena's question, Godou sighed.

They arrived at a sphere of light, roughly 6-7m in diameter. The trio were then devoured by the sphere of light.

In the following instant, what entered their view was a scene they had never encountered before.

"Is this a forest?"

"And there's even a river."

Godou and Erica murmured to each other.

That was indeed the most direct description of the terrain before their eyes. However, this was definitely not the Casentino forest they were at earlier.

The river flowing before them was a grand and majestic river rather than a stream.

Both shores of the river were covered with numerous trees—Beech, oak and other trees in abundance.

Godou and his companions were currently beside a river that flowed through a forested area.

The sound of birds chirping could be heard. There was warm sunlight and dancing butterflies.

It was spring. Definitely not Tuscany in midwinter.

The water of the great river was quite pure and clean, displaying a sky blue hue, so beautiful its very sight was incomparably touching.

"What on earth is going on...?"

Even Ena was confounded, innocent as she was, feeling quite troubled.

Just as Godou was about to explain, a giant shadow flew over them overhead.

Two reptiles were flying high up in the sky. Furthermore, these were black pterosaurs, the same as the one sighted at the old castle hotel in Tuscany.

The black pterosaurs were spreading their wings casually, gliding through the air.

"Godou, hurry and look at that one!"

Erica pointed somewhere with her finger. On the same side of the river as their location, there was a *castle*.

The two pterosaurs landed within the confines of the castle. That was apparently their destination.

The castle was surrounded with walls on all four sides. Above the castle gates was a lookout.

Looking from a distance, maybe three or four buildings could be seen within the confines of the castle.

"The master of those divine beasts is there, right? Maybe a god or something."

"Or perhaps, a certain person's kin?"

Ena's comment prompted Erica to shrug and answer. Then they heard the sound of splashing.

On closer examination, a black dinosaur was swimming in the river before them.

Sticking out its neck, it gazed at Godou's group as they stood on the river bank. This was indeed the *Deinonychus* that was lurking in Casentino.

"This forest, could it be the lair of these beasts!?"

"To think it would be a [Lost World]. Let's retreat over there for now, how's that!?"

"I think it's a good idea. Let's all head over there!"

The trio reached an unanimous decision. With fleet-footed Ena in the lead, Godou and Erica swiftly departed from the riverside.

"So basically, King Salvatore made Madame Aisha's authority go berserk."

"Yes. Through the [Fairy's Corridor] Madame Aisha created, apparently 'somewhere in another world' akin to the Astral Plane was reached."

While walking through the forest, Erica discussed the unbelievable method of transport they had taken.

However, Ena made an incomprehensible expression.

"However, Ena can't sense any difference between this and the [Netherworld Crossing] spell Liliana-san used before. If it's an authority of His Majesty's kin, shouldn't it be capable of more amazing things?"

" "....." "

"Besides, this isn't the Netherworld, is it? It totally doesn't smell like that place at all."

"Your instincts are sharp as ever, Ena-san. Let me reserve my opinion on this matter for now. Before we clear up what kind of place we have arrived at, I don't want to say anything imprudent."

Faced with Ena's questioning, Erica tabled the matter in a rare move.

However, Godou could understand how she felt. Before the worst predicament could be confirmed, Erica most likely did not want to disclose bad news casually.

"I believe we are currently facing quite a difficult situation. Your point included, I will explain everything properly in sequence."

"Got it. This is probably a lot more complicated than visiting the Netherworld."

"Although it can't be helped, that's indeed the case. Under the current circumstances, what we should do is gather intelligence. Let's handle this problem first."

"So we need to find human settlement after all. But let's try divination to seek our next destination, how about it?"

"Suddenly so unscientific, huh..."

"Nothing of that sort, Godou. Don't you remember me using this to find your location from time to time? But this time, instead of a particular person, we'll try searching for faint presences of humans."

Ignoring Godou's snide comment, Erica took out a pocket watch .

This tool used the principle of dowsing to determine which direction to follow. Dangling the pocket watch from her hand by its chain, Erica waited for a brief moment. Then the pocket watch began to swing slightly like a pendulum.

"I don't know if this works or not, but it's better than having no direction at all. Let's check it out."

Erica started walking in the direction of the pocket watch's swing.

Godou and Ena followed. Soon after, they passed through the forest and reached a plain.

Indeed, a plain—An endless flat field stretched all the way to the horizon. This was a type of terrain seldom found in cramped little Japan.

There was a road paved over this vast plain.

Although the road was not especially wide, it was major route paved with a great amount of gravel. It was quite well designed, with gutters on both sides for water to drain.

If one were to follow this road, the chances of reaching human settlement was quite high.

Naturally, the trio quickened their pace and arrived at the road.

"Walking here on foot took roughly thirty minutes. Looks like we haven't completely exhausted our luck."

Using the pocket watch to calculate the time taken, Erica chuckled and smile.

As a side note, the clock indicated it was after 7pm at night. After confirming the time on the watch, Ena looked up at the sky and made a deduction very much in the style of a child of nature's.

"According to the sun's position, it's roughly eleven in the morning."

"The time really doesn't match huh..."

Just as Godou muttered to himself—

A cart drawn by two horses moved leisurely along the road, approaching Godou's group. Two Caucasian men were sitting on the driver's perch.

Their clothing was very simple, one could even call it crude without objections.

In short, each man was clad in a long-sleeved shirt with long hems, secured tightly with a belt, with baggy pants.

Inauspiciously, they both drew their longswords from atop the driver's perch.

They looked like ruffians in appearance. It was possible that they did not earn their living through legitimate means. Ena went " Hmm?" in puzzlement.

Did she feel suspicious to find these people on a horse-drawn cart, dressed in this manner?

That said, they finally managed to find people who could provide information. Erica immediately sprang into action.

"Hey, good sirs hurrying along your way! May I trouble you for a moment?"

Standing before the cart as if blocking their way, she asked in Italian.

She probably chose her most familiar language because she had no idea what the other side spoke. However, they did not seem to understand Erica's words.

This was apparent from their ignoring Erica, choosing to stare at Godou beside her instead.

“XXXX, XXXXXXX! XXXXX, XXX!”

“XX, XXXXXXX, XXX! XXXXX, XXX, XXXXX!”

Pointing their fingers at Godou, they were yelling something incomprehensible.

An unknown language. However, the linguistic nuance resembled German somewhat.

"Erica, do you know what they're saying?"

"I'm not too sure myself..."

Erica was fully fluent in English, German and French and even languages like Spanish, Greek etc did not pose a challenge to her.

For her to be stumped in translation, this place must be truly unusual.

As Godou nodded, Erica continued.

"However, they are extremely afraid of you. It feels like they are saying, 'You've finally arrived, black-haired devil!' 'Please spare my life!'"

Godou was shocked by this excessively unexpected explanation .

In addition, the men were glaring at Ena and shouting something. The meaning was still unknown. However, one could easily imagine from the way they cried out in fear with their twitching faces.

The straightforward child of nature felt displeased as a result and frowned heavily.

"Completely no idea what they're saying, but Ena feels very hurt."

Ena's displeased voice seemed to provoke the two men on the cart. They jumped off the driver's perch and began to unload the cargo from the cart onto the ground.

Carpentry tools, gray jars, pickaxes, heavy-looking sacks and dozens of coins.

Godou stared at the coins that were the last to be taken out.

They were all crooked in shape. Due to primitive metallurgy, they could not create perfect circles. Although the coins were mostly copper, there were a few gold coins mixed among them.

"XXXXX, XXX, XXXXXXXXXX!"

Then the pair ran as fast as they could, fleeing in the direction from where they had come.

They had abandoned their horses, cart and cargo. Godou spoke in wide-eyed shock:

"Say, those people were saying just now..."

"'Here's all our profit, spare us!' Something like that."

"Hey. In that case, Ena can translate it just as well."

Everything was so unexpected. The trio was dumbfounded at the same time.

Feeling baffled, Godou crouched down and tried to open one of the sacks. This size would be the same as Japanese standard sacks for packaging 5kg of rice. The sack was filled with a large amount of white powder.

"Seems to be wheat flour... What should we do with this?"

"Yeah. Given the circumstances, it's best that we just keep it for ourselves."

"Hey hey."

"No Godou, we are currently in an emergency. There is no reason not to make the most of useful supplies."

Despite his objections to Erica's statement, Godou did not voice them.

Indeed, considering the current situation, giving up on these supplies would be quite a shame. Hence, he decided to turn a blind eye and loaded the cargo back onto the cart.

Then the three of them mounted the cart and continued along the road.

They traveled opposite to the direction the men had fled. Erica sat on the driver's perch to control the horses. Along the way, she examined the various cargo, nodding her head frequently.

What particularly caught her attention were the patterns on the pottery jars as well as the words and faces carved on the gold coins .

In this manner, they traveled roughly three hours along the road.

Finally, the cart reached a small village. Brick houses were scattered everywhere in isolation.

Naturally, there were also people: young men resembling shepherds, guiding flocks of sheep; old men leading donkeys leisurely along the road; people carrying farming tools and passing through herds of cattle.

Houses, people's attire, their possessions, farming tools, everything was quite simple without exception.

Furthermore, Erica suddenly went to investigate a shrine. The building was constructed by the side of the main road. There were also quite a few thick pillars made of white marble. It seemed like a miniature version of the Parthenon.

Then Erica announced:

"So, Ena-san, I shall now disclose my speculations. This is most likely ancient Europe. The time period is roughly between the fourth and fifth centuries. The location is a province in the Roman Empire, probably Gaul."

"...Eh!?"

Usually the one shocking others with her bold behavior, this time it was Seishuuin Ena's turn to be surprised instead. Ena stared blankly in dumbfounded amazement.

"In any case, Madame Aisha's corridors connect the Netherworld to past ages. We have been exiled to the world of the past."

"Ehhhhhh!?"

Had Saint Raffaello not explained to him earlier, surely Godou would have reacted in the same manner.

Godou recalled the female Paladino's words with deep feeling. ' More than anyone else, Aisha-neesan is the most troublesome Campione.' Now he agreed from the bottom of his heart.

"Then what are we going to do from now on...?"

As Godou muttered, he also realized that a group of what appeared to be villagers were approaching them.

In the center of the group was an old man dressed in a stately toga. Wasn't this how people dressed back in the Roman Empire? Beside the old man were several well-built young men.

On further thought, Godou and his companions' manner of dress really stood out in this environment.

It was only natural that they caught people's attention. There were also some people who began stirring trouble like the two Caucasians from earlier.

The situation was getting more and more tumultuous—However, Godou realized something. The gazes of the people were clearly filled with fear and reverence.

While staring at Godou, they whispered to one another in subdued tones.

But among the many things they said, Godou could pick out repeated instances of the words "Uldin"[5] and "Tyr."[6]

Part 2

Four days had passed since the sudden journey through time.

However, language barriers and lack of supporting personnel were only problems in the beginning. Currently, Godou, Erica and Ena were living quite comfortably.

"This is the Falernus-produced wine that we obtained by a stroke of good fortune a few days earlier. We have brought it here specifically to urge Your Highness, Uldin, to savor and enjoy."

The old man in the toga was speaking with reverence.

He was the owner of the plantation that Godou and company had visited four days ago. Named Furius, he was even some kind of noble of Roman descent.[7]

Reportedly, he used to be a "senator" in a nearby city.

Perhaps due to these past experiences, his behavior remained quite dignified despite his humble posture.

"I'm sorry, although I've said this many times already, I'm not that man."

Godou spoke with embarrassment.

Behind Old Man Furius, a servant girl was carrying a one-armed jar.

It contained what was apparently "the gift offered to His Highness Uldin."

"My name is Kusanagi Godou. I'm the one who should be thanking you for your kind hospitality. Please, you don't really have to be so generous."

"I see... So that was what you were talking about earlier."

Hearing Godou's explanation, the old man nodded profoundly.

"My utmost apologies. I was mistaken because your appearance resembles the rumored [Tyr's Sword], His Highness Uldin, coupled with the fact that you are accompanied by beautiful maidens, one blonde and one black-haired."

Old Man Furius glanced behind Godou. Standing on watch were Erica and Ena.

Blonde and black-haired, a combo comprised of two beautiful young ladies. Indeed that was true.

Was this the reason why people were mistaken? Godou felt intrigued.

"Still, I would like to offer these gifts to you as a token of apology. Linde, please make preparations."

"Very well, master."

Obeying Old Man Furius' orders, the servant girl retreated inside.

As a side note, everyone was currently at the mansion that was Furius' residence, which was also serving as temporary accommodations for Godou's group. The old man's family originally lived in the mansion with him but had now gone off to live elsewhere.

In short, he had "offered" his own home for Godou's group to stay.

"Your Highness Kusanagi. Even though you are not His Highness Uldin, [Tyr's Sword] who rules over dragons, this does not change the fact that you are his kin. Please enjoy yourself without reservation."

"So the castle by the river is where that Uldin guy lives?"

"Yes, indeed. It is the castle captured by you—or rather, the dragon rider of the terrible Huns, His Highness Uldin."

The old man seemed to be speaking as though he were accommodating Godou's denials of being Uldin simply for convenience.

"Speaking of His Highness Uldin, he is not only valiant but also resourceful and broad-minded. In preparation for the new battles ahead, he must have made certain considerations."

The man named Uldin was apparently the unlawful invader who had attacked this place unchecked. Furthermore, he was the master of those pterosaurs.

Four days earlier, Old Man Furius had said:

'We will try to make your stay here as comfortable as possible. Also, please feel free to engage in any activities of your liking—'

Subsequently, Godou and the two girls were offered food and the house and they started staying at this plantation.

Even during today's "greeting," the old man continued to speak to Godou in reverence and retreated without staying for too long.

However, he made the following request upon his departure:

"If possible... I implore you, as well as your kin, His Highness Uldin, to show special mercy on the city of Raurica and the Holy Maiden."

He offered utmost reverence in this and other ways.

"Various things have been cleared up over the past four days."

Erica suddenly spoke up after the old man left.

She had carried out investigations in the plantation and the surrounding areas. She had also visited the old noble Furius and chatted for long periods of time to gather information without distractions. Furthermore, regarding the local language, Erica had said something like 'I believe this is one of the dialects that

developed into prototypical High German used in southern Germany...'

Campiones and high level magi were able to learn unknown languages exceptionally quickly.

Thanks to this blessing, Godou and his group finally managed to have dialogue with the villagers. However, the Japanese Hime-Miko apparently had not devoted her efforts to hone this linguistic ability. She explained that was because she seldom engaged in activities outside the country.

Nevertheless, it was an emergency this time.

As the premier Hime-MIko, Ena also learned the ancient language with undivided attention.

"Our current location really turns out to be the Roman province of Gaul, on its eastern outskirts. The great river we sighted on the first day was surely the Rhine."

"Speaking of the Rhine, I haven't even visited it in the modern world..."

Godou felt a little complicated, torn whether this visit counted as a gain or a loss. Then Erica continued:

"Although I didn't notice in the beginning, this place is actually within the territory of modern Switzerland. Near the city of Basel. If one were to follow the Rhine downstream, Strasbourg is also quite close."

"Isn't that on the French and German border?"

Hearing these place names, Ena asked.

"Gaul is ancient France, right? Then we're really on its very edge ."

"Yeah. We are currently on the shore of the Rhine that separates Gaul from Germania. During this part of history, the Rhine also serves a boundary for Roman civilization."

"In other words, the lands beyond the river are undeveloped?"

Godou tried to draw out his knowledge of world history.

"I recall that the Germanic tribes lived in Germania. Goths or whatever they're called, right?"

"That would have been the case in a slightly earlier time period. But now, the situation is already changing. If one were to dwell upon these matters, we have really arrived in quite a troublesome age."

"How so?"

"Based on the gold coin I saw on our first day here, I surmised we had arrived in the Roman Empire after it splintered into eastern and western halves."

Narrowing down the time period simply from seeing the design of a coin to tell when it was used.

Godou was thoroughly impressed with Erica's abundant knowledge. However, the Diavolo Rosso made a worried expression despite her feats.

"After hearing about current affairs, I know that the current emperor is named Flavius.[8] Fearing the Goths who had invaded the Italian peninsula, he is currently confined in his capital, Ravenna."

Erica's expression remained displeased as she murmured indifferently.

"Concluding from all this, I believe we are currently at the beginning of the fifth century—Between 400 and 410 CE. This officially marks the beginning of the Western Roman Empire's collapse."

"Is that where the problem lies?"

"The current situation will exacerbate rapidly very soon. The empire already has no power to save itself. The Germanic kingdoms will become the new rulers of the empire's territory. As a side note, Gaul will be invaded by savage equestrian tribes a few decades later. They will cross the Rhine."

Erica detailed what was going to happen in the future.

"In this time period, the other side of the Rhine—Germania—is under the equestrian Huns' sphere of influence. They are the

greatest threat to the Roman Empire and the Gauls. Germanic tribes were driven across the Rhine to settle inside Roman territory , thereby sowing the seeds of many conflicts."

"The Huns... I remember reading about them in a World History textbook."

The mysterious man, Uldin, mentioned earlier was also a member of the Huns.

Prompted by the mentioning of this tribe, Godou recalled certain things.

"There was this king guy called Attila who brought great tumult to Europe, right?"

"Yes. He is the great king who united the Hunnic tribes that had been lacking in solidarity and battled the Eastern and Western Roman Empires. Renowned as a king of kings. His rise occurs roughly thirty years from now?"

"So a warring states era is going to begin soon."

"I guess we'd better get back to our original time as quickly as possible..."

After listening to Erica's explanation of the world situation, Ena and Godou remarked with deep feeling.

"But Your Majesty, how are we going to get back?"

"I guess once we find Aisha-san and ask her to open a 'corridor' to connect to the modern age, it'll be fine. But finding her might not be that easy."

"The chances of success are quite low if you search aimlessly."

Godou sighed and Erica remarked with a shrug.

He recalled what Saint Raffaello had told them before their journey through time.

'That Nee-san's "corridors" are really a whole lot of trouble... It creates openings similar to caves, connecting to "another world that does not exist in the current one." The Astral Plane and past ages included.'

Saint Raffaello was frowning severely when she said this.

'Once Aisha-neesan goes on a journey, the corridor will temporarily disappear. But it apparently reappears in the same place... several times a year. Passing through it will take you to the same world where Aisha-neesan had gone.'

'So, supposing someone was unfortunate enough to enter it...'

'Then they'll fly over to the other side, obviously.'

'If dinosaur-like divine beasts really are traveling through that "corridor"...'

'Oh, then that means things can also come from the other side, of course. This authority of Aisha-neesan's seems to have been usurped from the fairies of Tír na nÓg from Celtic mythology.'[9]

As Godou tried to fish for answers, Saint Raffaello proceeded to give ominous replies one after another.

Hence, Erica had inquired of her great senior who was showing a bitter expression.

'Speaking of Madame Aisha, she is most famous for her long period of living in seclusion...'

'That's only an illusion. There never was any living in seclusion to begin with. Aisha-neesan often uses her corridors authority to travel all over the place. Consequently, she spends very little time in the contemporary world, which results in rumors of her living in seclusion.'

Recalling the conversation, Godou became quite depressed. Then he realized something.

"However, by the time we came to our senses, we were already at the riverside. I didn't see anything resembling the entrance to a cave in that vicinity."

"It probably still exists somewhere around there..."

"But it only reappears a few times a year?"

Ena and Erica's successive comments caused Godou to sigh again.

"That means even if we go back there, we can't return home any time..."

"Besides, Godou, there's an even more troublesome problem. This is the place the man named Uldin has made his base of operations. Furthermore, he also managed to maintain a herd of divine beasts through certain means."

Erica brought up the greatest problem.

"He is very likely a Campione from this time period, right? It is possible for a great mage to summon a single divine beast with great difficulty. But to keep a whole herd, only a god or a Campione is capable of that."

"Yeah, that's right..."

"Simply going on what people said, that guy doesn't feel like a god."

"In that case, we must be cautious when approaching that place. Whenever two Campiones meet, something always happens. We have already experienced plenty of that in our contemporary age."

Godou nodded, Ena murmured while Erica summed up the main point.

Truly feeling the gravity of the troublesome situation, the trio fell silent in contemplation. Just at that moment, there was a crash.

Turning their gaze, they found the servant that the plantation owner had brought earlier—the young girl named Linde had dropped a clay cup on the floor, breaking it.

She was intending to pour out cups of the wine that was meant as an "offering," apparently on her way to serve Godou and company.

"I-I'm very sorry! I can't believe I'm so clumsy!"

Linde apologized profusely with an expression as though the world was about to end.

She was a blonde girl roughly thirteen or fourteen in age, similar to Godou's younger sister Shizuka. She was a girl with an exceptionally cute face and extraordinarily pale skin.

She was dressed in what resembled a knee-length t-shirt with a belt tightly around her waist.

Simple and crude attire. She had been the one who stayed in the mansion to serve Godou's group during the past four days. How could anyone even think of scolding such a girl?

"Don't mind it. You can clean up slowly once we go out."

If Godou were to propose helping out with the cleanup, Linde would have flown into a panic instead.

Godou gestured to his two companions with his eyes. Swiftly, he stood up and left the room. Naturally, Erica and Ena followed him.

The corridor was lined with many pillars while the spacious garden even had a little pond.

The house, built in Roman architectural style, had a few dozen rooms. From the perspective of a modern Japanese, it was quite extravagant. This point was driven further home by the fact that Godou had heard that the homes of commoners only had one room.

"Oh right. Teach me how to ride a horse."

Godou recalled this matter as he walked through the corridor.

The mansion had stables and Godou had been informed that they could use them at will.

"Considering this time period, it would probably be a useful skill."

"Oh, great idea. Ena is not skilled in this area either and hopes that someone could instruct properly."

"No problem at all. But well, from the standards of this time period, I'm definitely no expert."

"Does the standard change with the times?"

"Yes. This is the era when true equestrian tribes spend most of their lives on horseback. However, I am confident that my horse riding skills are superior to a typical Roman's, so don't worry."

While listening to Erica's strangely proud claims, they arrived outside.

This area was Old Man Furius' plantation, a different place from the village where they had first met.

However, it apparently covered a vast area five or six times that of the Tokyo Dome (five hectares). Godou's first impression had mistaken the plantation for natural scenery...

Bringing out horses and riding equipment from the mansion's stables, they started practicing on a suitable plot of empty land.

Also, stirrups did not exist in ancient Rome. This was a type of riding equipment that dangled from the two sides of the saddle, allowing the rider to step on them for support. Without stirrups, the difficulty of riding was greatly increased.

"During this time period, the only people in Europe who used stirrups were equestrian tribes like the Huns. But given their ability, they were even capable of riding bareback horses calmly and shoot arrows while mounted."

"That's amazing. Even in Japanese mounted archery competitions, it'd be quite difficult without stirrups."

Listening to Erica's trivia, Ena expressed her admiration while struggling with her own unskilled horse riding. Compared to Godou who was a complete novice, she was doing much better.

As a side note, they did not have any riding equipment that could serve as stirrups.

This type of saddle, used by Roman cavalry, had horn-like protrusions on their four corners which the rider used to stabilize themselves from the unsteady rocking of their horses.

As expected, using spears, bows and arrows during horse riding was invented out of necessity.

On this day, they ended up practicing until sunset.

Part 3

Then night arrived. Just when Godou was about to go to bed...

Very unused to horse riding training, Godou had to employ many muscles he normally would not have used, resulting in a comfortable sense of fatigue.

The way to eliminate fatigue was a good dip in a boiling hot open-air bath.

"I feel so lucky to be enjoying something like this..."

Godou muttered softly, enjoying the unexpected sense of bliss.

Reportedly in cities built by Roman hands, great baths in the empire's style were nothing rare. However, they were rare luxuries on a farm like this. Due to the lack of aqueducts, simply the transportation of water already took monumental effort.

However, there was a flowing hot spring in the back of the mansion.

(According Erica, this current plantation here was located quite close to the border between modern Switzerland and Germany. This place was supposed a land of hot springs since ancient times and even the Roman army would use it as spas for recuperation.)

Thanks to these natural amenities, they were able to enjoy this simple pleasure.

However, Godou suddenly recalled something while he was soaking leisurely in the bath.

Come to think of it, didn't that servant girl mention something about how the people at the plantation would use steam baths for sweat therapy?

"It sounds quite interesting. Maybe I should try it out later."

Godou leaned back against the bath's edge as he muttered.

At this moment, Godou heard the whispering voices of his two companions who were not supposed to be present.

"Jeez, this Godou, even though he keeps saying 'it's better to go back sooner,' he's already fully adjusted to this time period."

"Well, he is His Majesty after all. His Majesty is someone who always survives no matter where."

"—!?"

Godou looked back frantically to find Erica and Ena before him.

The two girls were wearing nothing with only white cloth covering their chest to serve as bath towels—There was not even a scrap of sheer fabric over the rest of their bodies. In other words, they were fully naked.

"W-W-W-Why are you two here...!?"

Godou asked in a trembling voice.

Just like him, they had sweated a lot during horse riding. However, because they said they needed to do something, Godou had entered the bath first by himself.

Under Godou's stares, Erica and Ena stiffened their bodies from embarrassment.

Probably due to embarrassment and nervous tension? Their expressions were quite stiff and they were inexplicably avoiding eye contact with Godou.

However, the two girls nodded at each other as if they had resolved themselves and entered the bath together. Then Erica approached Godou's right side while Ena took the left!

They were very close. Godou's separation with Erica was 20cm while Ena was roughly 10cm away.

Then the blonde beauty frowned with severe displeasure.

As if competing with her rival on the other side, she shrunk her separation from Godou by 5cm.

Seeing her behavior, the black-haired child of nature hesitated for a moment before drawing herself closer with a rare, timid expression as she watched Godou's face.

They were extremely close to each other, their bare skin almost touching.

"Hey, Ena-san..."

Murmuring with displeasure, Erica also took action.

Naturally, she also approached so closely that their skin was about to make mutual contact. Sandwiched between the blonde and black-haired beauties, Godou began to tense up severely.

"C-Can you explain clearly why are you two doing this...?"

Godou managed to mutter his question.

He was mobilizing all of his self-restraint, dispelling all notions of wanting to make more intimate contact with these two girls. Even so, the current situation remained rather troubling.

Regardless, Erica and Ena were completely naked apart for the piece of white cloth each had over their chest respectively.

Of course, before Godou's eyes were the two girls' silky-white and tender skin as well as the attractive bodies he was already quite familiar with—

Godou froze his head and line of sight, only staring straight ahead.

Absolutely do not gaze left or right. Absolutely do not look. He repeated strongly to himself over and over again.

"Godou. From hereon I wish to negotiate with Ena-san to reach an 'agreement prohibiting stealing ahead.'"

"W-What stealing ahead?"

"To prohibit stealing ahead regarding Your Majesty. Ena has already discussed many things with Erica-san over the past four days."

"So we intend to decide on the specifics with you as the witness, Godou."

"What the heck, that's..."

An unexpected conversation was taking place between the trio in the open-air bath.

However, Godou finally managed to recover from his panic. His companions consisted of the combination of Erica and Ena who were especially prone to unprecedented, unconventional behavior. However, so long as he kept his cool and approached them with strong rationality and critical thinking, Godou should be able to resist them.

Godou warned himself to remain resolute in the face of all occurrences as he tensed his expression.

"I knew it. Umm... I must cross that line with His Majesty and become even more intimate..."

"This place is different from contemporary times and is quite a dangerous situation, yes? ...Taking into account the suspension bridge effect, I believe it is quite likely for that type of situation to develop between Godou and either of us..."

"Guah!"

As Ena murmured shyly, Erica whispered softly with a slightly worried expression in response.

Watching them like that, Godou's calm was instantly blown away.

"Particularly me, I have not opposed the idea of having children with Godou, starting a very long time ago..."

"Oh what are you saying, Erica-san? Even me, Ena, has already considered the prospects of doing that with His Majesty all the way back in the beginning."

"But Ena-san, don't you find that type of undertaking quite daunting in some ways?"

Erica spoke with the tone of a salon mistress who was worrying about a female friend.

Rather than trying to make difficulties for a rival, her tone of voice was very broad-minded and accepting; very much in Erica's style, one should say.

"Regarding this point, I believe we must venture into this unknown domain with as positive an outlook as possible... For the sake of sharing that joy with Godou..."

"E-Ena definitely has no problems too."

Although it felt a little like she was forcing herself, Ena continued to assert.

"One will always manage when the time comes to try this sort of thing for real. Nothing comes out of it unless you actually try, that's what my granny said."

"W-W-W-What the heck are you two discussing in front of me... "

" "....." "

Godou finally managed to get a word in, prompting embarrassed expressions on the two girls' faces.

As if to conceal her embarrassment, Erica coughed dryly.

"In any case, we must avoid escalating that type of competition. We are already facing a difficult crisis, so we shouldn't waste unnecessary effort and energy."

"That's why we need to make a detailed agreement."

Erica and Ena joined forces.

"Before we return to the modern era, neither of us will try to forestall each other. Then there's no problem, right?"

"Yes, no problem. Ena has no objections."

"But if Godou were to be consumed with desire under some sort of impetus and he demands on his own initiative..."

"It'll be treated as an exception. Ena thinks there's no grounds for reprimand in that case."

"Indeed. Precisely because he's Godou, I am quite confident that the possibility exists for him to behave that way."

"Then it'll be impossible to refuse..."

Hearing shocking words, Godou frantically interrupted:

"W-Wait a sec! That's the kind of person you two take me for!?"

"Indeed. In that area, you'll surely toy with us thoroughly for sure."

"However, when His Majesty acts in that manner... Ena doesn't dislike it. How about you, Erica-san?"

"I, on the other hand, hope that he could control that bold and unrestrained side of his somewhat. Of course, it's quite refreshing to be treated that way on occasion. I can't deny that it doesn't feel bad at all."

"Oh, Erica-san doesn't hate it either. Sure enough..."

"Ena-san, this is quite unladylike. Please choose your words carefully before you speak!"

"Uh... How should I say this? I'm very sorry in various ways."

Stuck in this girl talk, Godou could no longer bear staying any longer. Of course, he deserved all this for what he had done in the past so there were no grounds for him to complain.

Just as the discussion was getting underway, a fourth person arrived.

"S-Sorry to disturb everyone in your enjoyment..."

Godou did not expect the new arrival to be Linde.

Furthermore, she was wearing nothing apart from a loincloth. A young maiden's smooth skin and delicate body was displayed in full view. Fortunately, she was carrying a small jar in her arms, thus barely obscuring the front view of her upper torso.

"W-Why have you come to this place!?"

"I-I was thinking of serving you all in the bath... Oh, here is the perfume the master ordered me to bring to you. He said it was for the two princesses to use..."

Linde bowed her head as she spoke as though avoiding eye contact with Godou.

Her body kept trembling. It was clearly fear. Godou could not help but reprimand.

"Entering the bath the way you're dressed is unacceptable! Men and women should bathe separately in a place like this!"

"Godou... Even if you say that now, it's completely unconvincing."

"The way it looks now, you're just having Ena and Erica-san serve you while you enjoy the pleasure."

"Th-That's because you two suddenly intruded. Uh, no matter what, if I'm overcome with impure thoughts and end up doing something wrong, it'd be bad, right?"

"No, not at all. Should that situation actually arise... I have already prepared myself."

"Eh?"

Watching this ancient girl declare as she bowed her head down dejectedly, Godou was rendered speechless.

He stared at Linde in dumbstruck shock. Quick on the uptake, Erica spoke on Godou's behalf.

"Your duties are done here. Please go prepare dinner next."

"V-Very well. I understand. Princess!"

Given instructions by Erica, Linde swiftly disappeared from the bath like a puff of smoke.

"What on earth was that child thinking..."

"Godou, please understand your current situation. Now is a good opportunity to explain things for you."

Erica explained to Godou as he went limp in exasperation.

"Listen well, Godou? You have been mistaken for Uldin who is no simple invader. He is the military leader with the greatest power and influence in these lands. His position is that of a king and a chieftain's."

"A king, you say?"

"Yes. Furthermore, this isn't modern society. Given a tyrant of the ancient world, illegal and immoral acts are condoned for the most part. Presumably, violating that child is also not a problem."

"What!?"

"Although it's quite unpleasant, it does occur frequently..."

"However, I must make one thing clear to you. Should that type of situation arise, you must suppress yourself absolutely. You must limit your lust only towards me or Ena-san."

"Erica, how could you say something like that as an unmarried maiden!?"

Godou scolded the Diavolo Rosso loudly for what she proposed with a blush.

However, Erica continued with a face full of embarrassment.

"But it's very important. Although it also includes disallowing your affections to stray, the main worry is that you might leave descendants behind in this era, you know?"

Godou stared wide-eyed at the sudden mention of "descendants ."

Then Ena commented with deep feeling as if explaining things further.

"It was the same with my grandfather. Great men with illegitimate children. If Your Majesty were to sire children in this era, it could end up doing something like changing history."

"When saving someone, there is also the terrifying possibility you are consigning someone else to death."

Erica sighed listlessly.

"How about a better description? The effects occurring a century or a millennium later cannot be predicted at all. Stemming from one incident, people who were supposed to be born may end up not existing. People who should have played great historical roles becoming nonexistent, ultimately causing changes to both history and the future..."

"Ah, you mean the butterfly effect?"

Realizing what his companions were getting at, Godou nodded.

"A tiny butterfly flapping its wings could end up causing a hurricane to form elsewhere faraway. It has been mentioned in movies about transcending time and space. However, is it really that easy to change history?"

Godou could understand Erica's suggestions. However, he was still only half-convinced.

Compared to this issue, he considered male and female sharing an open-air bath, conversing while essentially nude to be a greater problem.

As if suggesting to himself as he endeavored not to look towards the sides, Godou spoke:

"There are limits to what a human can do."

"If you really were a normal person, then you wouldn't need to be so neurotic."

"A person capable of even slaying gods. Even alone, most wars could probably be won single-handedly. With a little more effort, establishing the boundaries of one or two kingdoms should probably be a piece of cake."

Faced with the girls' successive accusations, Godou went "...", rendered speechless. Come to think of it, Saint Raffaello had mentioned before:

'Most people would have trouble sleeping peacefully at night ever again if they heard the full story.'

'This is a dangerous matter that could change the world completely. In actual fact, it has already started.'

What if humans who had traveled through the corridors or Madame Aisha herself, more than anyone else, were to change past history?

Stemming from that, momentous changes could occur in the future world—

Indeed such a possibility existed. If penicillin had been invented back in the Edo period, there would be great changes in history and medicine from then on.

"Was Saint Raffaello referring to this when describing Madame Aisha as the most troublesome...?"

Clearly a cut above the other six Campiones, the troublemaker who traversed time and space.

Realizing this meaning, Godou sighed.

"There are far too many unknowns. Avoid doing anything rash, Godou, okay?"

"Yeah, that's really true... I will remember that carefully."

Godou nodded deeply to acknowledge Erica's advice.

Just at that moment, a giant shadow flew overhead in the night sky. It was one of the pterosaur-type divine beasts in Uldin's service. Only a single pterosaur was flying swiftly.

"Is it returning to the castle?"

"Perhaps it's scouting. According to rumors, [Tyr's Sword] Uldin has set his eyes on Augusta Raurica as his next prey."

"What's that Augusta whatever you just mentioned?"

"It's the Roman colonial city closest to here. Uldin has already visited that place many times over the past month, ordering those dinosaurs to attack in a half-playful manner. All of the city's elites have already fled. The defending soldiers have lost all their morale ."

"That's only natural. No matter how you put it, summoning dinosaurs in the ancient world is cheating."

Godou remarked emphatically, prompting Erica to smile wryly.

"Who knows if it's a blessing or a curse, but there are no authorities on biology in this time period. The dinosaurs have all been categorized as 'dragons.' Ah, however."

Erica smiled mischievously as she spoke.

"There was one piece of notable news. There is someone in Raurica whom the people call the 'Holy Maiden' and she has bestowed her protection upon the city—That is how it managed to barely pull through."

"They defended against the attacks of divine beasts?"

Ena was shocked by the news Erica revealed.

"If it's true, then that's really amazing. The only ones capable of that are gods or godslaying kings—"

Ena stopped midway. Godou also remembered a certain fact.

"Since the 'corridor' is connected to this place from the very start , the chances of Madame Aisha being in the area are quite high."

Erica smiled at Godou's mutterings. The Diavolo Rosso must have realized it a long time ago.

Godou nodded hard, clear where they needed to go next.

Part 4

It was the night they decided to head towards the city of Augusta Raurica.

Godou, Erica and Ena paid Old Man Furius a visit and exchanged parting pleasantries. Then they set off from the plantation during morning the next day, after receiving several " gifts."

"Rather than gifts, it feels more like robbery..."

"Oh my. All I said to them was how wonderful it'd be to have these items. Very kindly, they prepared them for us before we set off..."

Erica responded to Godou's grumbles in a sleepy voice.

The blonde girl, always vulnerable during early mornings, had not wakened completely. Nevertheless, she still mounted her chestnut horse in one gallant motion and started riding with complete stability.

Erica's horse, saddle and the full set of riding equipment were part of the gifts.

Godou and Ena were sitting on a four-wheeled, roofed, wooden carriage that was drawn by two horses. Over their modern clothing, the trio had a cape draped over each of them.

As a side note, they had also received some clothing native to this time period.

In terms of comfort and ease of movement, they all preferred their original clothing, however.

"Well, it shouldn't matter, right? It's not like we robbed the poor ."

Holding the reins as she sat on the driver's perch of the four-wheeled carriage, Ena remarked nonchalantly.

Riding the chestnut horse, Erica also nodded in agreement.

Seeing the two girls acting like this, Godou was impressed instead. In a certain sense, they were exhibiting a dependable and flourishing ability to survive.

Were the combination of Yuri and Liliana present instead, they definitely would not have accepted things so easily.

In any case, the horse and the carriage began their idyllic journey.

Horses would tire and collapse rapidly if they galloped at horse racing speeds. Hence, it was common sense to have horses trot at a sustainable rate. Naturally, this speed was quite slow. Compared to modern travel, there was no contest at all.

However, it did allow one to admire the scenery along the journey in great detail.

Godou and company were traveling along roads built by the Roman Empire's army. The empire's road network covered all of Gaul and allowed for efficient travel.

"If we wanted to travel quickly along this route, there is also the option of riding a boat along the Rhine."

"So that city called Raurica really is located along the river?"

"The shores of the Rhine have been home to many cities since antiquity. Strasbourg, Mainz, Bonn, Cologne... All the cities in that region were originally Roman colonies. However, they had different names during this time period."

With Erica as their travel guide to recount the past(?), the trio continued on their way.

Along the way, Godou and the girls had to spend one night outdoors.

Using the roofed carriage to serve as a tent, they took turns keeping watch as they spent the night.

Thanks to Old Man Furius' care, they had ample stores of food. Since Erica and Ena were able to conjure large amounts of water through magic, drinking water was not an issue.

If Godou really had to complain, there was the carriage's shaking that his body was unaccustomed to, which caused fatigue in his back and various joints. That was all.

Then the second day of their leisurely journey arrived.

Just as the sun began to set, Godou and his entourage could see the city just ahead of them.

They reached the city of Augusta Raurica. However, it was merely the size of a small town by modern standards.

Thousands of homes were lined in rows along the Rhine's shore.

Naturally, the road Godou's group followed led towards that direction. But compared to the town, the stronghold two kilometers ahead was far more important. The stronghold was surrounded by walls roughly five meters tall.

In terms of structure, this greatly resembled Uldin's castle.

Furthermore, Godou and the girls saw it. A creature circling the skies above the castle, the same type they had seen before. The black pterosaur. The *Deinonychus*-form divine beast that could suddenly grow wings.

However, this pterosaur had a rider.

A black-haired young man was mounted on a saddle on the pterosaur's back.

"So he's that Uldin person of rumor?"

"It's very likely. Just as the old man at the plantation said, he's very similar to His Majesty!"

As Erica wondered, Ena also made a surprising report using her excellent vision.

Very similar to him—Kusanagi Godou the Japanese?

As Far Easterners, Godou and Ena should be quite conspicuous existences in ancient Gaul whose population was virtually pure Caucasian.

Feeling intrigued, Godou's group spurred their horses to go faster.

However, before they could reach their destination, the pterosaur's rider made a move first. He tossed several small, white objects towards the ground.

They were seven teeth from some carnivore.

As soon as they landed, the teeth changed in shape. They transformed into forms shaped like the *Deinonychus*, except with bodies measuring roughly four meters in length.

The mini-*Deinonychuses* were equipped with well-developed hind legs and vicious, hooked claws.

They started running on their two hind legs, leaning forward such that their head, back and tail were in a straight line parallel to the ground. Their speed was akin to a steed's.

Born from teeth, the army of mini-dinosaurs instantly reached the castle gates ahead.

The few soldiers on standby in the lookout above the gates began to look nervous.

"Those things intend to attack the town!?"

The seven mini-*Deinonychuses* kept crashing into the castle gates that remained tightly shut.

On every impact, the wooden door would shake intensely. While this intense clash continued without pause, the heavy timber creaked noisily. About to break, the castle gates managed to hold.

Just as Godou was thinking a breach was only a matter of time if this continued—

Ten odd defending soldiers appeared on the castle walls.

Apparently, the walls were quite easy to mount from the inside of the stronghold.

They swiftly drew their "weapons" and prepared to attack. There were several massive crossbows mounted at regular intervals on top of the castle walls.

"W-What are those?"

"Ballistae—siege crossbows!"

As expected of a knight, Erica answered immediately.

The soldiers used roughly ten ballistae to fire without pause. They targeted the seven miniature dinosaurs. It was a sight akin to watching infantry fighting against tanks.

"Amazing. They look completely unafraid!"

"Rather than courageous, it's probably better to describe them as foolhardy. It won't be that easy for them to escape."

As Ena expressed her amazement, Erica was also surprised.

If they were the ones launching the attacks, the two girls would probably inflict fatal blows to the enemy with single strikes.

However, the Roman defenders also displayed great battle prowess. Using the ballistae—siege crossbows—they kept firing massive arrows that pierced the skin of the mini-*Deinonychuses*.

Accompanied by the splattering of blood, the dinosaur army groaned in pain.

Also, one of the arrows skewered a mini-*Deinonychus*' eyeball!

GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

Its eyeball destroyed, the dinosaur roared. It shook its head violently as if the pain were unbearable and rolled away from the castle gates along the ground due to the suffering.

YEEEEEEEEAAAAAAAAAAH!

Seeing this, the soldiers on the castle walls cheered with full fighting spirit.

Their morale was astounding, despite clearly having such monsters as opponents.

"I keep getting the feeling that it isn't actually courage. It looks more like their sense of fear has been numbed."

As Godou muttered, the situation took a new turn.

A man in his prime mounted the lookout over the castle gates.

He was wearing metal armor with a helmet decorated with striking feathers. It appeared to be equipment that expressed exalted status.

"Barbarian Uldin! Stop these barbaric acts that threaten our cities and towns, right this instant!"

He yelled across the glowing evening sky with his deep voice.

As a result, the black pterosaur landed near the lookout. It was Uldin. Until just now, he had been watching from the sky as the soldiers fought valiantly.

"Don't say such inconsequential things, commander. It's been quite a while since I last found prey of value, I'm just about to enjoy this joyful feeling."

A young man's voice. However, it was unbelievably filled with imposing solemnity.

Without being shouted loudly, it was still transmitted clearly to one's ears naturally. This was the mysterious man commanding the flying dragons—Uldin.

Godou could not help but listen intently to the man who spoke as he ordered his pterosaur to glide away.

"An easily defended castle that is difficult to besiege. Soldiers who remain fearless in the face of dragons. Furthermore, a valiant general to lead the soldiers—An apt description, wouldn't you agree? How fares the beautiful Holy Maiden, may I ask?"

"Shut up, barbarian! Stop subjecting this town to your violence and scram! Back to your dog's lair!"

"Hey hey. I am absolutely not a man who is difficult to communicate with, you know?"

In the face of the angry commander, Uldin replied with a regretful expression.

"By all means, if you'll swear loyalty, I don't mind being your king for now. All you need to do is fight courageously for two years and you'll surely accumulate sufficient wealth and victories."

"By that you mean you will take away the empire's citizens!?"

"Mmm hmm. Although it's a little much for me to say this myself, I am already quite used to this type of job. I'm actually quite good when push comes to shove, you know? I also want that Holy Maiden as my woman."

"Vile creature! You unreasonable, lecherous villain!"

While listening to their conversation, Godou nodded.

He was getting an idea of what kind of man Uldin was. He was very likely a man who commanded the masses and ordered others around as if it were second nature.

Hence, his words and actions naturally displayed authoritative solemnity.

On the other hand, Godou's two companions had different impressions.

"Indeed. This man is quite similar to His Majesty, right?"

"Making use of one's own authority as the godslaying conqueror, living a life surrounded by beautiful maidens. However, the man over there is quite candid about his desires."

"S-Stop lumping me with that kind of man..."

Godou could not help but grumble. Uldin took new action.

He suddenly whistled loudly, causing the rampaging mini-*Deinonychus* army to disappear like a puff of smoke.

"Very well, partner, I'll rely on you to go wild for a bit."

Uldin called to his pterosaur.

In that very instant, a commotion erupted in the lookout. Despite the commander's yells of "Engage!", the surrounding soliders forcibly dragged him down from the lookout.

The soldiers manning the ballistae on the castle walls also fled.

These soldiers had been fearless even against the *Deinonychuses*. They probably reacted differently now because they were familiar with Uldin's terrifying ways.

The soliders scattered like spiders, leaving no defenders to protect the gates.

"Smash it!"

The pterosaur's master, Uldin, gave simple instructions.

As his mount, the pterosaur opened its jaws wide and spewed out scorching lighting. The wooden door of the castle was instantly destroyed, blown away by the violent impact.

Although this was indeed terrifying power, Godou simply watched with eyes of appraisal.

Uldin should be capable of easily destroying this sort of stronghold.

Godou clenched his fist tightly. He should avoid changing history as much as possible. However, he could not accept leaving that man unchecked—

Should he act? He deliberated. However, it was only a moment's hesitation.

By the time he realized, Godou had already jumped down from the driver's perch of the carriage.

With that, he was able to move his body freely. Then Godou chanted spell words:

"For victory, hasten forth before me... O immortal sun, I beseech thee to grant radiance to the stallion!"

Godou had long realized the man was the people's enemy.

Hence, he was a suitable target for Verethragna's third incarnation, the [White Stallion]. The time was currently dusk. Sinking in the western horizon, the orange sun gave off radiant light.

This was the spear of fire and light released by Verethragna as the heavenly child of the sun god Mithra.

"Hmm...?"

However, the instant the setting sun quivered in response to the spell words, Uldin also took action.

Frowning in surprise, he picked up a small-sized bow from his saddle with his left hand while an arrow with a golden arrowhead suddenly manifested in his right hand—

The instant Verethragna's [White Stallion] was released, the ancient Campione called out:

"O arrow of Rudra[10], grant unto me the radiance of the sun's halo!"

These were spell words to control a sacred authority. Next, the arrow of gold was fired towards the setting sun.

At the same time, a second sun appeared in the eastern sky.

It was the sun that was supposed to rise with the morning glow. However, the glow of dawn was currently coloring the brilliant red of the dusk sky into a rosy shade.

Then a sword of fire and light was released from the second sun .

"Godou, be careful! Like the [White Stallion], that's an authority for controlling the sun!"

Erica's warning made Godou understand completely.

Uldin was also a Campione who used the sun as a weapon. As a user of the same power, his instincts had alerted him to danger, prompting him to strike in response!

The sun god's flames flew from the east while the [White Stallion]'s flames approached from the west.

Godou's group watched as the two fiery masses clashed violently overhead, colliding with each other and mutually annihilating simultaneously.

"Oh, I knew it..."

Uldin muttered as he watched the battle of flames.

He looked down from atop the pterosaur, obtaining a bird's eye view of the land. His gaze stopped where Godou's group was positioned. Then he gazed straight at Godou.

...Despite Erica and Ena's presence.

Uldin made the pterosaur descend and landed in front of Godou.

"Yo, comrade. Godslayer whom I am meeting for the first time. You must be the one who obstructed me, right?"

This was the very instant of the encounter between two Campiones, one ancient and one modern.

Chapter 5 - The Godslaying Holy Maiden

Part 1

Uldin was riding the black pterosaur as though it were a horse.

On the ground, Godou gazed up at him, sitting there on the " dragon" saddle. However, Godou did not feel any sense of inferiority. He shrugged and asked:

"How did you figure out so easily that I am your kin?"

"All I needed to do was to find the most arrogant person around here apart from myself. The only one present who is not afraid of me, that's you and no one else!"

The term "Campione" did not exist in the ancient past.

Hence, Godou had not used the term. Uldin replied unceremoniously.

Just as Ena had reported earlier, Uldin did resemble Godou in face. However, it was not like they were two of the same mold. At most, one could conclude they were "blood-related cousins" but that was it.

More than anything else, it was their overall appearance that contributed the most to their resemblance.

Both were roughly 180cm tall. Black hair. Black irises. Furthermore, Uldin was undoubtedly mongoloid in race. The

Huns were the descendants of the Xiongnu tribes that had fled from the orient—Godou recalled this description.

"In that case, comrade, let me ask you a question. Why did you get in my way?"

"Well... If I let you do as you pleased, you're going to destroy the town the way you wrecked the castle gates and attack the people, right?"

The ancient Campione had a relatively well-proportioned face. However, compared to his face, his vigorous and forceful airs left the deepest impression on others.

Godou gazed into Uldin's sharp eyes and said:

"How could I ignore such a cruel act occurring before my eyes? People will surely die."

"Well, that's because there's a war going on. But don't worry, I'm not the type to hunt down and slaughter those who flee. It's much more profitable to sell captives as slaves."

Surrendered enemies were the victor's property. Indeed, it was a notion that belong to ancient ways of thinking.

Uldin declared "I am not a man who indulges in needless slaughter!" and proudly puffed out his chest.

Despite realizing there was a fundamental difference in values between them, Godou still tried to persuade Uldin.

"Like I said, I can't approve of that."

"Why? I have no intention of entering a conflict with you. Not only that, but I also want to treat you like a guest. I could even hold a welcoming feast for you."

Feeling puzzled, Uldin stroked the messy beard on his chin.

Very likely, he was completely unable to comprehend why Godou would propose a "cessation of hostilities."

"It's quite rare for me to meet another of my kin. Although I've no idea if we could get along harmoniously, I really hoped we could at least toast and share drinks before we part ways. Comrade, that's really cold of you."

Uldin ended up sounding like a cool and hearty hero.

Perhaps in Uldin's mind, using physical force to invade and plunder was no different from industries like hunting and fishing.

Godou frowned.

This man was a godslayer and a member of a warring equestrian tribe that treated conflict and plundering as their daily life in this time period.

Was it really a set of values incompatible with that of the modern pacifist, Kusanagi Godou—?

"No, wait a minute. I get it now. Hahaha, I guess it's my fault for overlooking something."

Uldin suddenly laughed.

"Sorry, my bad my bad. I should have realized sooner why you're giving me such a hard time. This city has caught your fancy too, huh?"

"Oi."

"Let's be open with it all. You want to compete with me to see who can become the master of the city, right?"

Godou was shocked by Uldin who was speaking like a friendly older brother. Furthermore, Uldin was casting gentle glances at Erica and Ena who had been listening intently to their conversation.

"These are your women, right? Excellent taste, I'd say. Speaking of which, the one known as the 'Holy Maiden' is also inside that castle. Did you know that she is also quite an outstanding beauty?"

Uldin's tone of voice was upfront and lacked any sense of tension.

However, that did not imply laxity in battle preparedness. Were Godou to attack, Uldin would surely respond in kind with a smile.

"Or perhaps, you'd like to make the Holy Maiden your woman as well? Hohoho, she is definitely no ordinary person for she seems to possess strange powers."

Uldin inquired in a testing manner. A shred of acuteness only flashed for an instant amidst his gentle gaze.

Holy Maiden—Who on earth could she be? Was she really Madame Aisha?

Faced with Godou's surprise, the equestrian godslayer began to utter nonsense while seated on his dragon saddle.

"Well, since we're both godslayers, I think it'd be a great idea to have a battle to decide who gets the city and the woman. Very well , let me take a little time to consider whether or not to accept your challenge. Please wait for my reply!"

Uldin patted his dragon mount on the head.

The black pterosaur flapped its wings forcefully and rose through the sky, illuminated by the evening glow.

Only at this moment did Godou notice.

The divine beast had displayed excessive wariness when approaching the Campione, Kusanagi Godou, at close range.

But in the scene just now, the black dragon had not shown any signs of fear. This was probably the terrifying aspect of Uldin's power to control and command dragons.

"A temporary farewell, comrade. Please tell me your name next time. I am Uldin and people sometimes call me [Tyr's Sword] or [Devil King]!"

Leaving behind this hearty farewell, Uldin flew east.

After watching the figure disappear into the sky, Godou returned to the carriage.

"What should we do next? Should we just enter the castle?"

Mounting the carriage's driver perch, Ena asked.

It looked like she had gotten off earlier in order to stand by in case Godou needed assistance. On the other hand, Erica had not dismounted, acting literally like a "knight." She replied:

"Of course. Let's enter the place as planned."

"But is this really okay? His Majesty and Uldin-san just fought a magnificent skirmish. Those people look very wary."

"Precisely because of that, things will be easy. Rather, I'd say it's perfect."

Several soldiers had returned to the top of the castle walls during this time.

In lowered stances, they were peeking at Godou's group. Even from far away, it was obvious that their attention was directed towards this group—More accurately, they were staring at Kusanagi Godou.

While enduring the gazes of these ancient people, Erica and Ena continued their discussion.

"If we wanted to, we could easily engage them in battle all at once. Besides, Godou is right here, yes?"

"That's very true. So, if they decide to attack, why don't we simply take the castle for ourselves? Then we'll use it for the battle against Uldin-san."

"That idea is under review, but I don't think it actually matters."

Erica assured them from astride her beloved horse.

"Even if we don't go that far, Godou can definitely stay here as a guest without any problems. It's not too difficult to become the highest actual authority here, either."

"As expected of Erica-san. Your plan probably embodies the description, solid as a mountain."

"....."

Before they entered the castle gates, Godou listened to the two girls engaged in a discussion about unsettling plans for conquest.

Although Godou was shocked by their radical ideas, he did not express his objections.

Ena took up the reins and made the carriage move towards the castle gates. Erica also rode her horse beside them.

Godou was not sure what the blonde female devil was planning exactly, but he resolved to stop her if she brings calamity to the citizens... Godou swore secretly to himself.

After several minutes, the trio finally passed through the gates.

Instead of being vertical, the castle walls sloped gently on the inner side. These walls were constructed by piling a large amount of stones over earthwork fortifications. There were steps in various places, allowing the castle walls to be easily mounted.

The rectangular stronghold occupied an area of roughly 500m by 600m.

One could describe it as the size of a village. In actual fact, there were five or six rows of buildings resembling townhouses. Godou was struck by a sense of deja vu, reminded of Japanese residential neighborhoods and areas with singles apartments.

The center of the stronghold was called a plaza.

Several hundred soldiers were currently gathered at the plaza.

Most of the soldiers were wearing helmets and ring mail while armed with spears and oval shields.

Godou, Erica and Ena walked right into this armed gathering. Normally, they should be the ones venturing in trepidation, fearful of the situation.

However, the soldiers were actually the ones watching Godou's group in fear instead.

Just as they were about to arrive before the army, Erica suddenly spoke up:

"I wish to speak to this castle's commander. Is there any problem!?"

Without dismounting her horse, she simply asked elegantly.

Tossing the blonde hair that adorned her head like a crown with its reddish luster, Erica gazed down at the soldiers.

It almost looked as though she were the superior officer in charge of this army. Then the soldiers parted all at once, allowing a man whose helmet was decorated with feathers to approach.

It was the person Uldin had addressed as the commander.

"What business do you have, lady? Do you serve that man over there...?"

After taking a glance at Godou and Ena, the commander asked stiffly.

During this time period, blonde hair and blue eyes were the characteristics of most members of Germanic tribes. On the other hand, Japanese people with their black hair and black irises would look like Huns like Uldin.

The commander seemed to understand why one member of the trio was of a different ethnicity.

On the other hand, Erica still puffed out her chest despite being mistaken for a slave, smiling with a "Hmph."

"I shall explain my position in detail later. But first, please answer this question. Do you have any intention of hiring my master, Kusanagi Godou, as a mercenary?"

"Did you say mercenary?"

The commander was surprised. However, the suggestion was also quite unexpected for Godou as well.

Godou stared at Erica intently. She continued to explain in an elegant tone of voice.

"This Kusanagi Godou here is a man who shares the same origins with [Tyr's Sword] Uldin."

"So he really is from the barbarians..."

"Just as you all know, Uldin is a warrior who wields power equal to the gods. However, Kusanagi Godou also possesses the same ability. You saw how they both shot fire descending from the heavens, yes?"

"Hmm..."

"In terms of power, they are equals. However, Kusanagi Godou absolutely does not share Uldin's ambitions. We now offer you the opportunity to hire Kusanagi Godou and his tribe as soldiers, yes?"

Two hours later, Kusanagi Godou had become the captain of the mercenaries of Augusta Raurica's border defense. His identity and status were now guaranteed.

However, one could describe the terms of employment as absolutely absurd.

Kusanagi Godou and his subordinates were given full autonomy on the battlefield. They were open to requests but were not duty-bound to follow orders. Every month, they were paid a massive salary. Etc etc.

"Hey you, those are really astounding demands. Are you trying to squeeze them dry and swallow them alive..."

"It's all good. Apart from you, Godou, there is no one else capable of fighting Uldin."

Godou expressed his opinion, but the blonde negotiator defended herself.

As a side note, they were now currently at the stronghold's headquarters in front of the plaza just now. This building contained spacious halls, corridors lined with columns, and even a central courtyard. The design was quite majestic.

Godou's group had gone to the empty courtyard to engage in a discussion between moderners.

"Because they know that very well, they accepted the unprecedented terms and conditions."

"But they hired His Majesty so readily despite the fact that he looks like one of Uldin-san's tribesmen. Why isn't there more resentment or wariness?"

Ena's mutterings caused Erica to chuckle with a smile.

"It's not a problem at all. During this time period, the Roman army would often hire foreign ethnicities by the tribe as a unit to serve as mercenaries. Examples include Germanic peoples such as the Goths or the Vandals, and of course, the Huns as well."

"Even Uldin's tribe as well!?"

"Yes. Remember back when we were investigating the mystery of Sir Lancelot, the names of Sarmatians and Scythians came up? They frequently served in the Roman Empire as mercenaries."

"Why would they hire armies of foreign ethnicity specifically ..."

"During this time period, the Roman army had lost its former strength and were weakening progressively. Furthermore, equestrian tribes were far superior as cavalry. Even the Germanic peoples were far more familiar with horses than true Romans."

Erica explained to alleviate Godou's shock.

"In the end, excessive reliance on foreign mercenaries was one of the reasons for the Western Roman Empire's collapse. But because we are in this sort of era, thriving is a simple matter provided you have that desire, Godou."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Ah, basically this. Seizing real military power in the countryside and establishing yourself as a warlord."

Ena began to giggle like a mischievous child.

"In an era when central authority has weakened, those who wield military power are effectively the ones in power. The rise of many feudal lords during Japan's Warring States Period followed the same principles."

"Yeah, now that you've made it that explicit, even I get it now. But come on, you two!"

Hearing the two girls' unsettling conversation, Godou protested with deep feeling.

"Didn't you two advise me a few days earlier? About taking care not to change the course of history?"

Godou's reminder produced a clear effect. Ena smiled in embarrassment while Erica turned her face away as if to hide her expression. Clearly the two girls had forgotten their own advice.

"Fair enough. But given who you are, Your Majesty, it's like having the strongest army even alone by yourself, so Ena could not help but naturally get excited."

"In actual fact, Uldin has been doing whatever he wants by himself most of the time."

"That's right, that's right. Also, displaying your valor to the world and conquering the land in unification, that would feel quite cool. If you put some effort into it, perhaps you could become a great king whose name is recorded in this era's history, Your Majesty."

"You could inherit the dream that Alexander III of Macedonia could not realize."

"It'd be fun if you could achieve Genghis Khan's great conquests , seven hundred years before he does it."

"But if your territory grows too vast, it'd be difficult to administer your rule. This type of large empire always breaks down from its core. This has been proven by history."

"Wow, the ideas just keep coming once we start thinking about this."

Hearing Ena and Erica chatting nonstop in excitement, Godou began to ponder.

This team of two girls were equipped with intellect, initiative and occasional bursts of impulse. Indeed, they were more

dangerous than could be imagined. In order to prevent these two girls from going out of control, Godou resolved himself to watch over them carefully.

Godou steeled his determination once more.

"Our first priority is returning to the present. Please rein in your conspiracies—"

Just as he spoke up, cheering could be heard from the plaza outside.

The soldiers were apparently clamoring.

"The great Holy Maiden is here! We're going to be healed by the great Holy Maiden!"

These honest and unsophisticated cries were filled with admiration and faith.

Part 2

Accompanied by Erica and Ena, Godou exited the headquarters.

There were roughly ten soldiers lying stretched out on the stronghold's plaza. Among them were people with injuries of varying severity: those with minor afflictions like bruises and broken bones, unconscious people, those wrapped in layers of bandages due to severe burns, etc. There were even a few soldiers on the verge of death.

Their painful moans made Godou uncomfortable.

"They were apparently caught in the blast when Uldin's dragon spewed out lightning just now."

Erica had inquired about the situation from the soldiers gathered nearby.

Also, there was a black-haired woman standing before a wounded soldier who was lying on the ground. Due to the loose white robe she was wearing, her figure could not be discerned clearly.

However, she possessed a beautiful face that clearly belonged to a young maiden.

Probably seventeen or eighteen in age by appearance. Her delicate face embodied a mixture of elegance and grace. She was a beautiful maiden who gave off an impression of great gentleness.

Godou and his companions exchanged glances with one another. They were all quite surprised.

The girl's complexion was brown. Clearly she was not of European birth. Even so, the soldiers did not treat her as some strange sight. Instead, their gazes offered admiration and goodwill towards her.

"O Holy Maiden, please grant us your merciful blessings—"

The olive-skinned girl made a troubled expression in response to a pleading soldier.

It looked as though she wanted to say "Oh dear, what should I do?" Then after a few seconds of hesitation, she made a determined expression.

"Although I have no idea how far my prayers may reach... I will put forth my greatest effort to pray for you all..."

The girl spoke softly as she knelt down and clasped her hands together before her chest.

Quietly, she closed her eyes. Her posture was akin to that of a pious nun engaged in a sacred prayer. Then a gust of wind began to blow at this time.

This wind felt very comfortable and gentle.

Godou shuddered. He could vaguely feel the presence of divine power.

Immediately, the ten or so wounded soldiers sat up all of a sudden. They were all bearing nonchalant expressions as if nothing had happened.

As far as one could see, their external injuries had all disappeared. Their bodies seemed completely fine.

The change was particularly dramatic for the soldiers who had suffered burns. Their skin had become as smooth as a baby's, without even any swelling remaining at all.

Rather than a miracle, one would describe the recovery and resurrection as comedic.

What happened just now, was it really an authority—!?

Just as Godou frantically tried to run towards the girl—

Ohhhh

Although the crowded mass of soldiers were in the way, they yielded a path automatically as soon as Godou pushed himself between them.

They apparently regained their senses as a result of seeing the man who had battled Uldin just earlier.

Thanks to that, Godou managed to make his way before the girl who was more slender than he had imagined.

Dressed in a white overcoat, the olive-skinned beauty tilted her head as if going "Ara?" as soon as she saw Godou's face.

It was an elegant motion that matched her polite and graceful airs.

"Are you Aisha-san? My name is Kusanagi Godou."

"Yes, a pleasure to meet you. I've never been called by my real name in this land before."

The olive-skinned girl smiled faintly as she replied.

"I've also heard of your name. If my memory serves me correctly, you are my seventh compatriot who appeared in the world of the distant future..."

These words settled the truth beyond a doubt. Indeed, the beauty before Godou's eyes was precisely the person he sought.

This was the instant of Kusanagi Godou and Madame Aisha's encounter in the ancient land of Gaul.

"The great godslayer who had displayed power equal to Uldin-san—after receiving news that the commander had hired him, I originally intended to pay a visit to offer my greetings. However, I was asked to heal the injured soldiers..."

Godou found out that Madame Aisha's residence was a Christian church inside the city of Raurica.

In order to find a "quiet place" to talk, Godou had gone to the church together with the Madame. Perhaps because of the venue, there were no significant differences in architectural style compared to those in the modern age.

Erica and Ena had also gathered in the chapel. Thus, a conversation began with no ancient people involved.

"So the power displayed just now, was that really your authority, Aisha-san?"

"Yes. It is the power I unintentionally usurped from Persephone , the goddess of spring. By sharing the energy of life with all living beings, wounds can be healed."

The Madame was answering Godou's question with a sad tone of voice.

Somehow there was a sense of dissonance that could not be dispelled, greatly puzzling Godou. Not even half a day had passed since he met Aisha. But so far, the impression he got was that she seemed to be a really good person.

Gentle and magnanimous, the type of person whose presence people would describe as healing.

She exuded an atmosphere that felt as gentle as the spring breeze. Displaying her graceful smile, her radiance illuminated people's hearts—

That was what Godou found strange.

Apart from a few special exceptions, Campiones were all heaven-sent children of disaster with serious personality flaws.

Weren't those the hallmarks shared by the Campiones as a group?

"Madame. Would you permit Kusanagi Godou's knight, Erica Blandelli, to speak here?"

"Of course you may. Hoho, you're quite courageous for a girl."

She smiled nobly and gently as she granted permission to Erica.

Madame Aisha possessed a face that could only be described as a "beautiful girl's". At the same time, she was capable of behaving like a broad-minded noblewoman.

Erica inquired with utmost respect of this lady.

"Madame Aisha, may I ask why you have come to this city? Also, why are you known as the 'Holy Maiden'?"

"I came here only by pure chance. While traveling aimlessly in this time period, I arrived at this place by chance. It happened to be just after Uldin-san had attacked the town... There were many injured people."

Aisha explained with a slightly troubled expression.

"After helping various people heal their wounds all over the city, somehow I became known as the Holy Maiden before I knew it... Then they asked me to stay. As it so happens, the bishop of this church was absent as well."

"Was he killed by that Uldin guy?"

"Oh no, not at all. From what I've heard, the bishop had left the city in order to avoid Uldin-san. Being a nobleman of Roman blood, he returned to his homeland."

"Speaking of people like monks, many of them turn out to be selfish people."

Prompted by Godou's question of what happened to the bishop, the Madame smiled wryly while Ena commented with giggle.

The Yamato Nadeshiko could have chosen her words with more tact and grace if she wanted to, but perhaps influenced by contact with Madame Aisha's temperament, Ena made a forthright statement very much like a child of nature.

In fact, the Madame simply smiled lightly and did not seem inclined to reprimand her.

Completely devoid of a Campione's ferocity, was she really a good person?

Feeling quite intrigued, Godou decided to clear up the most fundamental question.

"So, please answer another question. What's your goal in visiting this time period?"

"Goal... huh?"

"Yes. Your goal, Aisha-san. This is something I couldn't figure out all this time."

Traveling from the Italian countryside to ancient Gaul.

One could not discern any logic or reason. Why did she create this kind of passageway? Godou's questioning gaze caused the Madame to bow her head in embarrassment.

"Umm, actually... That corridor-creating authority, I can't control it very well."

"Eh?"

"When I actually want them, I can't make them at all. But when I forget all about it and go on a stroll or a trip somewhere, a hole is naturally created once every few years."

"N-Naturally?"

"Yes, even if I don't have any intention of going anywhere, the holes will randomly connect to some era in the past or the Boundary of Life and Immortality. Furthermore, because a terrifying power sucks me into the hole, I end up being forced to go on a journey."

Hence, the reason why Godou's group was "sucked into" the corridor in Tuscany was not entirely due to the rampaging effects of Doni's authority.

It also stemmed from another Campione who possessed a troublemaking authority.

But then again, Madame Aisha was actually the one who made trouble for herself, was she not...?

"By the way, it apparently doesn't connect to the future. After all, it has never connected to the future before."

"So basically, the destination is completely random..."

"Yes, you are right. Ah yes, however, it seems like most of the places I visit often have people in trouble. For example, there were large numbers of wounded people such as what happened here with invaders or citizens oppressed under tyrannical rule."

Madame Aisha frowned for the first time and clenched her fist tightly.

She was probably recalling the anger she had felt during her past travels. However, she still looked adorable when making this sort of expression and gesture. This woman was very likely the determined variant of the healing type.

However, Godou was beginning to understand her true nature.

Unaware of the thoughts going through Godou's mind, Madame Aisha asserted seriously with a stern yet adorable expression.

"Perhaps—it is the will of the heavens that I should bring salvation to the people in desperation. All of my authorities exist for this very purpose!"

"W-Wait a sec, Aisha-san. You must be mistaken somewhere."

Godou tried to correct her as calmly as possible.

Well, perhaps it was not coincidence that she encounters people in need at her travel destinations. However, even if that were the case, it did not mean Madame Aisha should unconditionally become a savior.

"The Astral Plane aside, there's a great risk of changing the course of history when you visit the past. If you act on whim to help people, thereby sowing seeds for changes in history—Doesn't that mess up the future instead?"

Events not happening as they were supposed to. People not being born as they were supposed to. People not dying as they were supposed to. Creation of things that were not supposed to be created. Even the face of the world could go so far as to be altered dramatically.

Imagining such tumult in his mind, Godou continued to offer his frank advice with a dispassionate tone of voice.

"Our powers are quite absurd and unnatural already..."

"I-Indeed, what you say is possible. But I think it's definitely fine. After all, I've already survived a good many times..."

"A good many times?"

"Yes. Even that time with what happened to Frederick the Great , I was already mentally prepared for the consequences, but in the end, there was nothing strange when I returned to modern times... "

"...Umm, could you explain that clearly in greater detail?"

Godou's attempt to probe deeper into her unintentional slip of the tongue prompted the Madame to go "!?" in realization.

She turned her face away as though she were avoiding eye contact with Godou and desperately tried to cover up.

"N-No, I didn't say anything! K-Kusanagi-san, you must have made a mistake in what you wanted to ask about!"

"There is no mistake here. What I want to ask about is the seemingly crucial matter you just mentioned!"

So this really is the case? Godou was struck by a heartfelt revelation as he retorted.

Even a benevolent and gentle "good person" was perfectly capable of becoming a child of disaster with personality flaws. Furthermore, only just now did Godou realize that Madame Aisha's personality was unexpectedly prone to bouts of self-absorption.

And a person like this was regularly traversing space and time...

"...That Frederick guy, I remember he was an emperor roughly three hundred years ago?"

"...Although there are many figures bearing the same name, the only Frederick renowned as 'the Great' would be the Prussian king , Frederick II. Not only was he a cultured man with excellent upbringing, he was also a great diplomat and a military genius. Obtaining many victories where the enemy forces outnumbered his army by at least two to one, he was a great and indomitable king."

Ena and Erica whispered quietly to each other as they stood beside the completely terrified Godou.

What kind of incident had Madame Aisha actually caused? As Godou watched, the problematic character coughed dryly and spoke up:

"H-However, Kusanagi-san. Based on my past experience with dozens of repeated travels, this is what I've come to believe. History very likely has a 'corrective force' at work!"

"C-Corrective force?"

"Yes. Unlike the future, the past is like a story where the plot is already decided. If anything happened to alter the plot, I believe the corrective force will do its utmost to rectify logic."

Story, plot, rectify logic.

Madame Aisha uttered words which seemed quite inappropriate in a discussion about the problem of altering history.

"For example, if the king ruling from a country's zenith happens to die, the close aides and people pulling strings from behind the scenes would desperately try their utmost to cover up the king's death. If people who were supposed to die were saved, they would die suddenly a few years later by accident or illness..."

"In other words, what you're asking us to consider has happened many times already?"

"N-No. The examples just come from my imagination, rather, I should call it a hypothesis!"

"Well, hypothesizing is fine... Anyway, I have another issue I want to understand."

Despite Madame Aisha's attempts to cover up using clumsy acting skills, Godou tried asking another question.

"Despite this corrective force, which could very well cancel out all of your efforts, Aisha-san, why do you still continue to save people? Isn't it clearly futile?"

"If the people I save are unrelated to the basic outline of history, it probably doesn't always get corrected."

Madame Aisha smiled and replied.

"And despite everything, I can't stand back and watch without doing anything. What follows, follows. Isn't it fine for me to help people in need without hesitation and I'll just worry about the details later?"

"....."

Although he disagreed with the appropriateness of her actions, Kusanagi Godou himself had gone and hindered Uldin from destroying the town.

Hence, Godou really could not bring himself to reprimand her. Silently, he nodded for now.

Then Ena suddenly spoke up.

"Actually, it totally slipped my mind until now. Where did King Salvatore go? There's no sign of him and no rumors either?"

Salvatore Doni. The man who should have arrived in ancient Gaul before Godou.

Hearing that name after so long, Godou and Erica exchanged glances.

"Now that you mention it... I've completely forgotten him thanks to all the hectic stuff these past few days."

"I still remembered but just didn't have the leisure to search for him."

"Oh my, I've heard of that name a little. Apart from you Kusanagi-san, have other godslayers crossed over from the modern world?"

"Yeah. He should have passed through that 'corridor' a few minutes before us."

Godou and his group had first arrived at the Rhine's shore.

Was that guy hiding somewhere in the thickets in that vicinity? Seeing a puzzled expression on Godou's face, Madame Aisha smiled gently.

"If that were the case, it cannot be helped that you were separated."

"How does that work?"

"Although the 'corridors' opened by my authority do send people to the same place, there are subtle differences in the destination time. In this aspect, one could call it a little sloppy."

Sloppy. What an unsettling word. Then the Madame continued:

"For example, suppose a 'corridor' manages to send people to the year, 500 CE. However, there would be no way of deciding which month or day is the destination. Whether you arrive in spring, summer, autumn or winter, it's entirely up to luck."

"Luck!?"

"As a side note, the time I arrived here was two months ago, during midwinter."

"So that guy Doni could have been sent to several months earlier?"

"Or conversely, he could have arrived several months later from now."

"What sort of unreliable time machine is this..."

Godou could not help but grumble. Oh well, the 'corridor' turned out to be just a simple passageway.

Expecting to adjust time with precision on the scale of minutes was probably impossible. However, Godou could strongly feel a connection between this matter and other troublesome things.

Part 3

It was said that Dejanstahl Voban was born in the earlier half of the eighteenth century.

His rival, Her Eminence Luo Hao had once mentioned herself that she "became a Devil King some two hundred odd years ago." According to the testimony of her direct disciple, she was apparently born in a prestigious family involved in the martial arts realm, originating from a clan of outlaws.

Together with Madame Aisha, these two were known as the Campiones of the older generation.

However, Madame Aisha's era of birth was unknown.

According to Erica, "There was a legend that somewhere in the mid to latter part of the nineteenth century, a certain person, who grew up in a British colony, managed to slay her first god."

She called herself by the single name of "Aisha."

No family name was given. "Madame" was simply a courtesy title people offered in respect to noble ladies. Presumably, she did not have a husband or children either.

She still had a house in her home base of Alexandria.

That was the mansion where she lived in seclusion for long periods of time—Although this rumor about her existed, in actual fact, she was a traveler who did not walk the modern Earth.

"Because I have the kind of personality that cannot bear to live in one place for too long, in that sense, this corridors authority can be said to be a valuable treasure."

"In other words, you love to move house frequently?"

In response to Madame Aisha's admission that ran counter to a shut-in's personality, Godou remarked to concur.

The current location was the general's quarters inside Augusta Raurica's stronghold.

This was the residence assigned to Godou who had been hired as a mercenary captain. Unlike the rectangular homes inhabited by ordinary soldiers which resembled apartments, Godou's was a detached house.

In the reception hall of the house, the two modern Campiones were engaged in a conversation.

Two days had passed since Godou's arrival.

Although Godou was nominally the leader of a mercenary team called the "allied division," his only subordinates were Erica and Ena.

Most of the soldiers and even the commander were fearful of the "man who was able to fight Uldin equally."

His days here were still short.

Having returned to his quarters, Godou had been pondering how to improve his relations with the soldiers when Aisha made a sudden visit. Knowing that each other had nothing to do, they started to chat.

"Although I don't move house, I need to take a long journey once in a while, lasting for years. Otherwise, I feel so confined it's like suffocating."

"Where have you visited during these long journeys?"

"Let me think. For example, when I was sent to nineteenth century London, I took a steamboat for a return trip to India. If my starting point was ninth century Samarkand[11], I would cross the Pamir Mountains and the Tian Shan mountain ranges by camel to head towards Chang'an[12] via the Silk Road—"

"Even if you can make trips to the past, could you stop indulging yourself in adventures!?"

Unlike her contemporary Devil Kings, Madame Aisha's personality and eccentricities were quite different.

However, Godou would always find ridiculous things that compelled him to retort during the various topics they conversed

on. In particular, whenever she talked about her own personal experiences, Godou would notice a change that ran counter to her appearance of a graceful beauty's.

As a side note, Madame Aisha had currently taken off her white overcoat.

She was wearing a female tunic beneath. An outfit resembling a t-shirt secured with a belt, reaching down to her knees.

Because she was so lightly dressed, Godou could clearly see that the Madame's slender figure was quite voluptuous in all the right places.

"But isn't it kind of tough to be wandering around everywhere? Don't you often meet xenophobic people who'll reject foreigners?"

Godou recalled what his grandfather, Kusanagi Ichirou, had mentioned before.

His grandfather was a folkloristics scholar whose research themes focused on traditional culture and arts in Eastern Asia. Godou had heard stories of Ichirou's youth when he had visited towns and villages all over various Asian countries to conduct interviews and research without pause.

It was quite common for foreign strangers to be ostracized by the locals, although Ichirou had overcome this challenge as easily as though he were a master of deception.

On the other hand, Madame Aisha's appearance was even more striking than Godou's grandfather. And she was also a woman as well. That would have caused more troublesome experiences, right ? Despite Godou's worries, she replied calmly.

"Oh, that's not a problem. Because I have an authority that causes everyone to like me."

"I see."

"It's the authority that I was forced to usurp from a certain Catholic saint in the Catholic religion. Thanks to its blessings, no one troubles me no matter what time period I visit. I consider it one of my important treasures."

"So that's how you blended harmoniously into this town so easily. By the way..."

As Madame Aisha gratefully counted her blessings, Godou asked philosophically.

"Since it's a deity's authority, it should be capable of something more dangerous than 'making others like me.' That's quite a subdued way of using it."

Godou recalled what Ena had mentioned back when they had first arrived in Gaul.

In actual fact, hypnosis magic was capable of similar manipulation of people's impressions.

Madame Aisha looked troubled in response to what Godou had pointed out.

"O-Of course, naturally. This power can easily create a cult of fanatics who would lay down their lives for me without hesitation. But of course, such unruliness must be prevented at all costs..."

"Why does it have to be these kinds of powers!?"

Random creation of gates, leading to the past or the otherworld. Miraculous powers of recovery, capable of healing many heavily injured people in an instant. Charisma resembling a devil's charm.

The person possessing these powers also had an altruistic personality and liked to help others. Furthermore, she was a person with the initiative to keep embarking on adventures even in eras without cars or planes.

Godou could now understand clearly why Saint Raffaello wanted to avoid Madame Aisha like the plague.

For such a character to be wandering the past world incessantly, one would not be surprised by any changes in history at all.

"Upon further thought, it really was quite incredible... When Uldin visited earlier, the soldiers were fighting fearlessly against the monsters."

"Oh, because everyone was in a complete state of panic, I did a little..."

Most likely, she had offered encouragement to the soldiers directly.

Godou knew quite well the charisma displayed by heroic gods. Just as he nodded in acknowledgement of this surprising skill, he went "Hmm?" because he realized something.

Among all the authorities the Madame had talked about so far, none of them were related to combat.

Then how did she fight gods and her kin, the Campiones? Just as Godou was about to ask, he stopped himself in the middle of the process. He could not imagine a future where he would have to fight Madame Aisha.

Instead, he asked:

"By the way, how can we get back to the modern age? Could you please tell me?"

"There are two methods."

The Madame answered immediately. Perhaps she felt apologetic about getting Godou and the girls caught up in this incident.

"First of all, you can wait for the existing entrance to open up in this time period. The cave naturally opens during nights of the full moon when the sky is clear."

"In other words, there's a chance every month, but it's affected by the weather as well?"

"The second way is to gather a group of accomplished magi to open it. If you gather a sufficient number of excellent witches and people knowledgeable in the ways of fairies, using their knowledge and magic, it can probably be prepared in half or maybe a full month's time."

Madame Aisha explained what she had done in the past. However, Godou sighed in response.

"This can't be done immediately. Simply gathering all the people would be a challenge already."

In that case, he would have to fall back on the first choice—

Then how should he deal with godslayer of this time period, Uldin?

Just as Godou pondered the problem that had remained unsolved throughout these past few days, Madame Aisha suddenly leaned her face near.

"W-What's the matter?"

"I came to visit you today for a reason. Actually, I wanted to ask you, regarding whether those rumors circulating among the soldiers are true..."

"There are rumors about me?"

"They say that you've prepared a house outside the stronghold, Kusanagi-san, for two girls to wait on you there and live together under the same roof. These two girls are said to be your wives and concubines, Kusanagi-san."

"Wives and concubines!?"

The armies of ancient Rome did not permit soldiers to marry during their time in service. Marriage and having children had to wait until a soldier was discharged—Such a rule existed. At least, nominally.

In practice, the rule was already long dead. Soldiers would cohabit with unregistered wives and children near where they were stationed and would even have "secondary residences" in nearby villages at the same time.

In order to live and share meals together, Godou's trio had also arranged a secondary residence.

"Although I guessed that you share quite close relationships with those two girls you keep by your side, Kusanagi-san, I never thought you would indulge in the pleasure of romancing both of them simultaneously..."

"W-Wait a minute. Those rumors are wrong in all sorts of ways!
"

"But it's true that you have the two girls serve you in that home, right?"

"Of course not. We're just 'living together' in the same place, that's all!"

Madame Aisha gazed intently at Godou's panic.

Then her eyes looked as though she were a nun listening to a sinner's contrition as she spoke slowly:

"Kusanagi-san, please do not find excuses for yourself. You were lying just now. As soon as I saw the darkness in your pupils, it was obvious."

Indeed, Godou did have many memories he was ashamed of. Hence, he went "!?" and panicked.

"Despite how I may look, I am a woman who has visited all countries, ancient and modern, oriental and occidental. I do have some confidence in my ability to judge people. Why don't you come clean and confess everything honestly?"

"Aisha-san, what good would listening to all that do for you!?"

"No. Excuse me but let me offer a little simple insight."

Like a female sage who had acquired total wisdom, the Madame explained in a sharp tone of voice:

"Universally, no matter the time period or location, all women enjoy certain topics of conversation. Namely, other people's scandals, love-hate disputes, love triangles... Of course, I am no exception!"

"Doesn't that just mean you love gossiping!?"

Seeing the Madame gradually leaning in closer and closer, Godou retreated the same distance.

While this conversation was occurring, one of the girls in question entered the reception hall.

"So you're here, Your Majesty. And Aisha-san's here too."

Ena smiled candidly as always. Madame Aisha smiled back gracefully in her usual manner, displaying great cordiality.

Meanwhile, Godou noticed the object in Ena's hand. She was holding a scroll.

Since they were in ancient Gaul, the scroll was probably made of papyrus or parchment.

"Erica-san wanted to show this to Your Majesty. Uldin-san was flying above the town on his dragon just now. This was the invitation letter he threw down."

"Invitation letter, you say?"

"Yes, to be handed over to Your Majesty. The words seem to be saying that Uldin-san is holding a welcoming banquet at his castle and that he hopes Your Majesty would grace him with your presence."

Taking the letter, Godou found the texture a little smooth.

The letter was written in a horizontal script with the Latin alphabet. Probably ancient Latin? How should he handle this troublesome opponent?

While staring at the invitation letter, Godou began to come up with a plan.

Part 4

The historic ruins of Augusta Raurica apparently survived to modern times.

These were the biggest ancient Roman ruins existing in Switzerland, according to Erica. In fact, the city of Raurica was so well-developed that one would not expect it to be an ancient border city.

The population was estimated at twenty thousand. With many stone-built homes, there was a network of paved roads that weaved back and forth throughout the urban area.

Aqueducts provided an abundant water supply to the citizens. There were theaters, amphitheaters, temples, Christian churches, forums where senators gathered, public baths, etc...

This was a typical ancient Roman colonial city.

Compared to medieval cities slightly further in the future, life here must be in much greater comfort.

When evening came, Godou left the stronghold and made his way towards the "secondary abode" in the high-class residential neighborhood. Naturally, Erica and Ena were together as well.

Along the way, they had a simple dinner at a plebeian-run restaurant.

"You two, compared to food that's good for your development, you really eat anything, don't you?"

"Because there isn't any food that is too strange, so it's fine."

"If only this were a coastal city, we would get to try moray eel cuisine, a staple of ancient Roman diets... What a shame."

The night's menu included salad flavored with salt, vinegar and olive oil; stew, made with beans and various vegetables; omelets with roasted sausages; plain bread; etc.

Ignoring Erica's dangerous murmurings, Godou and Ena ate with their hands.

Although this was an era without knives or forks, most of the food on the dining table was quite familiar.

Vegetables included cabbage, garlic, broad beans, onions, etc. Meat was dominated by pork. Poultry actually had goose more commonly than chicken, but Godou had not tried it yet.

Since most of the flavorings were salty, the taste was delicious to the modern palate.

After dinner, they made a visit to a bath along the way.

Ancient Roman-style public baths were quite famous. These facilities not only contained massive baths but also a sports arena and swimming pools. Naturally, men and women were separated in this place. After a solitary bath, Godou met up with the two girls.

By the time they returned to the residence, night had fallen completely.

Since it was a house prepared by the army, it was not only spacious in design but also luxurious.

Originally, a group of slaves were supposed to be living here as well. However, the idea of being served felt repugnant to modern sensibilities, so they had all the slaves dismissed. Thus, the trio currently lived by themselves.

After a change of clothing, Godou and his companions gathered in the house's great hall.

They were going to discuss the "invitation letter" that Uldin had delivered.

"Well, he must have some motive behind the invitation."

"At the same time, it's a chance for us to gather intelligence from the interior of the other side."

Erica and Ena instantly began the conversation.

Perhaps because of the earlier agreement to "prohibit stealing ahead," neither of them tried to tease or play around with Godou. Instead, they discussed the situation in earnest harmony. Godou considered this to be a good thing from his perspective.

On the other hand, their location and attire was quite problematic.

Erica and Ena were both on top of a spacious couch. They were lying casually on the couch in opposite directions with a map of the surrounding area spread out between them.

Furthermore, they were both dressed in ancient attire.

First of all, there were the silken tunics. Due to how low the hems reached, they did not need to wear lower garments such as pants.

Their bare legs were exposed completely.

Then there were the long shawls they wrapped around their waist and threw over their shoulders.

Dressed in this manner, Erica and Ena were lying casually on the couch.

Pairs of dazzling white thighs and bare legs were jutting out from the couch. Clad in sheer clothing, the massive bulges of bountiful bosoms and the seductive curves of their posteriors as they lay on the couch, the sight of all this was driving Godou's sanity to the very edge.

Furthermore, Erica and Ena had returned straight from using the public baths.

Hence, there was a reddish flush to their bodies, and the two girls were quite relaxed.

"So, I guess it's time for me to go to sleep..."

Finding an exotic allure in the unfamiliar sight of their current clothing and feeling an irresistible attraction towards the girls' relaxed and unguarded bodies, Godou intended to leave his seat.

Only earlier at noon, he had just told Madame Aisha that they were simply "living together."

Hence, Godou tried as hard as he could to avoid easily misconstrued situations. However, he was prevented from leaving.

"No Godou. The conversation hasn't ended, has it?"

"That's right, Your Majesty. You've been silent all along."

"Well... Seeing as I'm the only man here, it's really quite difficult to stay calm..."

Feeling like surrendering, Godou confessed with honesty.

However, Erica and Ena giggled and brushed his argument aside.

"What are you talking about? This is a place for family members to gather and chat happily."

"Yes yes. As the saying goes, do as the Romans do, so hurry over here, Your Majesty. Let's all lie down together for a chat."

This room was a great hall for holding banquets.

Members of the family would gather for reunions here or invite guests over for dinner. Chatting. Drinking. On the other hand, lying on this full-length sofa that resembled a bed was quite comfortable.

For a modern person, this was quite hard to get used to. However, this was the ancient Roman lifestyle.

Teased by the two girls, Godou felt his heart waver slightly.

The worst of it was trying to tear his gaze away from the attractive bodies of the girls who were lying down.

With much difficulty, he had arranged for the three of them to sleep in separate rooms. The current situation was rendering his efforts naught.

If he were to be overcome with rash impulse—This sort of " possibility" terrified Godou.

"No, look here. If some weird change occurs in my mood, then the agreement you two mentioned would be voided... This is for preventing that as well."

Godou expressed his thoughts honestly, hoping they could understand the legitimacy of his retreat.

However, Erica and Ena simply answered nonchalantly.

"Of course it won't be voided, because no one is stealing a march by making a move in advance."

"Yeah, because Ena and Erica-san want to conquer Your Majesty's heart together."

"Conquer!?"

"By the way, we won't lock our doors when we're sleeping."

"So please feel free to sneak in during the middle of the night."

"Wha—!?"

These shocking words caused Godou to feel as though his head had been struck by a hammer.

In the face of Godou's shock, Ena continued:

"Whether Your Majesty chooses Erica-san or Ena, neither of us will complain. That is what we agreed already."

"We are dressed the same way in order to create a level playing field. With this, the decisive factor boils down to our own attractiveness."

"Yes yes. Ena and Erica-san discussed already... So neither of us are wearing underwear or the like."

"Hold it right there, Ena-san!"

Seeing the Hime-Miko shyly make a shocking confession, the blonde female devil angrily expressed rare disapproval towards another person's unruliness.

"It is quite unladylike to reveal such matters so overtly. Of course, due to the possibility of Godou's overflowing lust, we needed to make this sort of preparations beforehand..."

"Oh sorry. But Erica-san, you are acting bolder than usual right now."

Ena apologized with forthrightness and laughed "Ehehe" in embarrassment.

"Seriously, stop making fun of me. Behaving like a lady or a noblewoman, as well as enjoying love boldly are equally important , you know? So, Godou."

Erica suddenly got up and walked over determinedly.

Grabbing Godou by the arm, she pulled him towards the couch. Ultimately, Godou could not resist the magic she had used to augment her arm strength.

Godou sat down on the couch in an immobilized predicament. Then Erica took a seat by Godou's right and leaned her seductive body tightly against him.

"We wish to act like ladies and won't force you to bestow your love upon us. So let us sit down here and discuss what's necessary, shall we?"

"If that's the case, why are you leaning your body against me!?"

"That's because it's comforting and delightful. The ideas won't flow if one were to force too much self-restraint."

Erica whispered softly. Apart from a soft shawl wrap, she was only wearing a sheer layer of silk.

Also, she was wearing nothing over her lower body. Godou felt terrified. In other words, the current sense of warmth from her body pressed tightly against him, the sense of weight from those soft breasts—Aren't these feelings almost like touching a nude body? The only difference was the smoothness from the sheer layer of silk in between.

"Of course, should you have the intention, Godou, I am very open to the idea of enjoying things in a different manner after the discussion."

Rather than seductively charming, the element of adorable loveliness was more prominent in Erica's current smile.

In contrast to her usual boldness and initiative, Erica was deliberately easing the pressure on her prey. In order to increase her lead on her competitive rival, Erica was carefully adjusting the pace of her rhythm.

Feeling the astuteness of her strategy, Godou shook his head in a panic.

"Jeez. You keep insisting on ladylike behavior in your speech, but immediately you act like this, Erica-san..."

Ena grumbled as she approached with displeasure on her face.

Opposite to Erica, she leaned from Godou's left side, pressing close as if trying to oppose her rival in the same manner. Naturally , the sensation was considerably warm and soft as well. The size and elasticity possessed by her breasts were enough to rival the Italian girl's touch.

In actual fact, Erica and Ena were quite similar in height and build.

Purely by the numbers, Erica's measurements were probably slightly superior. However, the visual impression of the two girls was "virtually the same." And through the current direct contact, Godou never expected he would have a chance to find out by touch that the conclusion was also "virtually the same."

"This reminds Ena of the time at Kisarazu together with Your Majesty."

Ena went "Ehehe" and smiled shyly as she recalled the past.

Seeing Godou shocked by her expression, Erica immediately spoke up:

"Oh dear, I have also shared a bed with Godou during that time in Sicily? That was quite a night we spent together."

"Even Ena has cooked personally for His Majesty before, you know?"

"In that case, I have also..."

Erica stopped herself midway while Ena went ".....", falling silent.

Then the two girls nodded at each other by coincidence.

"What our competition in these areas proves is that Godou is a wolf who never misses out on prime opportunities."

"Yes. Never missing out on any chance, that's His Majesty's style."

"R-Rather than that kind of issue, we have more important things to discuss, right!?"

Godou protested against the two girls who seemed to be getting along amiably.

Although the two girls getting along was supposed to be a good thing, Godou could not help but feel that his body was in danger. As he pulled the map over to his side for a look, the two girls also turned their gazes to the map.

The map showed the Rhine flowing from east to west. After flowing past the city of Augusta Raurica, the river took an L-shaped turn to the north at a certain point. As a side note, were this modern Europe, Raurica would be situated between Basel and the city of Rheinfelden which is famous for its hot springs.

Following east along the Rhine, one would reach Uldin's stronghold.

That was also the location of the forest that Godou and his companions had seen when they first arrived in ancient Gaul.

"The following information is only on the level of rumors. Reportedly, Uldin's forest contains several dozens of those flying dragons—The divine beasts resembling dinosaurs."

Erica continued to be leaning tightly against Godou as she spoke in a sonorous voice.

"In fact, we have sighted three of them already. Although the figure of 'several dozens' cannot be ascertained, there should be a considerable number of divine beasts at any rate."

"The guys in the army don't have accurate information in this regard either."

Ena was an innocent and forthright girl who could converse with older men without any reservations.

She was apparently making use of this skill even in the land of Gaul, making more and more acquaintances in the army.

"Recently, there are reports that no one dare enter the forest for fear of the dragons. Should Ena make a trip to do some detailed scouting?"

"Although I already considered it already... I object to the idea."

"That's right. If there really are several dozen dinosaurs, it's too dangerous."

Seishuuin Ena was highly agile and held the trump cards of divine possession and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

She was supposed to be the ideal person to scout. However, Godou also nodded and agreed with Erica's decision.

Due to the severe depletion of stamina caused by divine possession, Ena was not suited to protracted battles.

An ordinary monster would be fine but the lair of divine beasts would be far too dangerous for her.

"So I guess I'll have to take a look myself after all..."

"That's true. If we are going to collect information while encountering and fighting divine beasts, I believe it is the right decision for this situation. In that case, we can't let go of the opportunity to enter the heart of enemy territory provided by the opposing side's invitation..."

"Then that means we're accepting the invitation?"

"That is what I intend to do. However, permission is needed from the commander here."

Erica frowned as she answered Ena's question.

The mercenary contract already contained a clause granting " Kusanagi Godou the autonomy to act according to his own judgment." However, this was only applicable during battle.

Was the commander going to allow them to face off against Uldin proactively?

"Swiftly suppressing bandits and hostile tribes was originally the prided skill of the Roman army. However, should there exist a certain gap in battle potential against the enemy, the Romans would leave them alone in most cases. Especially against a powerful foe like Uldin, it would be like a gamble."

"Indeed, that guy only talks tough but he shows no intention of attacking proactively."

Hearing Erica's explanation, Ena nodded in agreement.

"If Your Majesty were to leave the stronghold, there would be no one capable of fighting Uldin-san. Should we try to apply for permission first, then sneak out if it's rejected?"

"Oh... In that case, there should be a way to accomplish that."

Hearing Ena's proposal which seemed quite improper, Godou replied.

He recalled his conversation with the fourth(?) companion during the daytime. Then again, relying on her power was also quite an unorthodox "method" as well—

The next morning, Godou and his companions arrived at the top of the stronghold's castle walls.

These were the walls built from a large amount of stones piled over five-meter-tall earthwork fortifications. The top was also paved with a pathway wide enough for two or three soldiers to walk side by side.

For example, when Uldin attacked, effective use was made of this pathway to defend the stronghold.

Godou, Erica and Ena were standing together on the pathway over the castle walls to watch the army in a military exercise. Roughly six hundred soldiers had gathered outside the stronghold to conduct training.

With six to a row, the soldiers were arranged in a formation.

Each soldier was uniformly armed with a spear and shield. Advancing together at the same speed, the soldiers in the front row all raised their spears in unison. Then without any disorder, everyone turned directions at the same time.

The stronghold was roughly two kilometers away from the town.

Hence, there was plenty of empty land to perform large-scale exercises.

"Watching them like this, it really feels like an 'army' now."

Simply watching the soldiers acting as a well-organized army was enough to feel somewhat moved. This sort of organized movement was impossible for an army of several hundred without accumulating substantial training experience. As Godou nodded, Ena also expressed her deep admiration from beside him.

"Since the empire is about to collapse, I was expecting the guys in the army to be so-so... But they turn out to be great."

"The soldiers are definitely well-trained. At this point, less than half a century has passed since Emperor Julian the Apostate led a Roman army of ten thousand to defeat an allied force of Germanic tribes, thirty thousand strong."

The one shrugging with an expression of commiseration was Erica of course.

"However, those people are enlisted from locals. Most provinces in the Western Roman Empire had armies like these, composed of Gauls and even Germanic peoples who had fled from the Huns. These people only sought to get paid and one could hardly expect any loyalty from them. Furthermore, the number of soldiers is paltry."

"They really do have all sorts of difficulties."

Lamenting the vagaries of life, Godou searched for Madame Aisha by sight at the same time.

He had requested for her to "convince" the commander. On further examination, Godou located Madame Aisha in her white overcoat, standing beside the commander who was overseeing the exercise.

She looked like she was making some sort of plea, going as far as to clasp her hands together as though she were praying. The commander nodded readily and the Madame smiled radiantly like a blooming flower.

The sight of this smile was enough to know that things went smoothly as planned.

"Looks like it's a success..."

"Although it really was a great help, it somehow feels a bit terrifying..."

"That type of authority can probably be abused within a substantially vast area. Someone with the Madame's temperament might be fine, but if the user were a villain with greater ambition..."

Feeling a sense of unease towards the air of spring geniality in Madame Aisha's face, Godou and his two companions nodded at one another.

Ever since their arrival in ancient Gaul, they had gone with the flow for most things.

However, it was time for them to take action with initiative.

"Our next problem is to consider how seriously to fight Uldin."

"I intend to resolve matters with that guy through dialogue... If it develops into a battle, will there be any problem?"

Seeing Erica murmur worriedly to herself, Godou felt baffled.

Then Ena suddenly asked:

"Is Uldin actually a person who is going to leave his name in history? If something happens to him, the future will be affected more or less, right?"

"I'm not sure yet, but a few possibilities come to mind."

Erica shook her head with a gloomy expression and continued:

"Even if the corrective force mentioned by the Madame truly exists, it is quite worrying whether it is capable of correcting the current situation..."

As a new journey was about to begin, Erica's murmurings felt rather inauspicious to the listener.

Chapter 6 - Captivity in the Devil King's Castle

Part 1

Before the whole commotion, Salvatore Doni had challenged Godou, "let's play a game!"

Viewing things through those words of his, they were now heading back to the game's starting point. Godou was currently entering the forest where Uldin's castle was located.

Sunlight streamed through the foliage, projecting sparkling radiance while a comfortable spring breeze blew past.

Were this the modern age, it would be a trek through a beautiful Swiss forest. However, this place was currently ancient Gaul and the forest was even a terrifying lair belonging to divine beasts.

"It said I'm welcome to visit any time I want..."

The content of the invitation letter could be described as rather ordinary.

Basically, something like 'Greetings comrade. If you happen to be currently living in that town there, then it's perfect. Please visit me any time you want. I will offer the best hospitality within my ability.'

Neither time nor place were decided. How enviable the lifestyle of an idle nomad.

Godou stepped into the forest which had neither entrances nor signs.

Taking a carriage took roughly a day to reach here. Since there were no roads for the carriage to pass through the forest, Godou had to continue on foot from this point onwards.

In any case, the Rhine's shore was his target. Godou walked casually for roughly thirty minutes.

During this time, he sighted divine beasts twice. Those black dinosaurs resembling *Deinonychuses*. Despite their seven-meter-long, massive bodies, they moved quite nimbly as they roamed the forest.

Without exception, they panicked and fled into the forest's depths as soon as they saw Godou...

"Isn't this treating me like a bear?"

Just as Godou shrugged, he heard the rustling of leaves.

Some kind of giant organism was pushing its way through the vegetation to approach him. Probably another *Deinonychus*? Indeed, the result was just as expected.

It was walking upright on two legs in its characteristic posture with its head, back and tail in a straight line.

With viciously hooked talons on the hind legs and a massive black body, the divine beast made another appearance, quite a

familiar sight by this point. However, this time there was someone riding in the saddle on its back. Not Uldin.

"Greetings to you for the first time. You seem to be the other godslaying monarch similar to my lord. Or am I mistaken?"

"Yeah, I am. That'll do for now. I am Kusanagi Godou."

Due to the other person's politeness, Godou bowed his head in modern Japanese etiquette.

The rider on the black *Deinonychus* was a blonde woman, clad in armor and leather with a helmet. Adorned with feathers on two sides, the helmet looked quite magnificent.

Furthermore, she was a great beauty with a slender figure and face and incomparably graceful airs.

"My name is Clotilde. Let me show you the way to my lord's castle."

She gave off a vibe like an elegant female warrior. Godou answered "Thank you" to accept her offer. The forest was mostly likely under surveillance and the appearance of an intruder had been reported.

"If you are not opposed to the idea, please ride behind me."

"Eh, is that really okay!?"

Godou was pleasantly surprised by the unexpected suggestion.

Riding on a dinosaur's back would be a rare experience indeed. Helped by Clotilde's hand, he mounted the back of the crouching *Deinonychus*.

During this time, the *Deinonychus* remained still and acted quite obediently.

Unlike the other ones earlier, it was not afraid of Godou. Hence, he was able to mount the saddle effortlessly.

Naturally, Clotilde was the one sitting in front of him. She had quite a tall figure for she was only slightly shorter than Godou whose height was 180cm. Speaking of which, she was quite strong despite her slender and delicate physique.

"Are you ready? Then we'll set off."

Issuing the command to start moving, Clotilde kicked the belly of the dinosaur that was no horse.

The *Deinonychus* stood up and began to run. Due to its long strides, it moved very quickly. Also, the motion was less rocking than Godou had expected, so the ride felt quite nice actually. This divine beast must be a type of creature that was quite talented at maintaining balance.

As a side note, Clotilde's feet were firmly planted in the stirrups .

Judging from the riding equipment, it seemed to be in the style of equestrian tribes. Hanging on the saddle were also a small bow and a quiver of arrows.

"We're about to take flight. Please hold on tight!"

Clotilde suddenly announced when they reached the Rhine's shore.

Although surprised for an instant, Godou immediately understood. Like riding behind a motorcycle driver, he wrapped his arms around Clotilde's waist.

Then immediately, the *Deinonychus*' short front limbs turned into wings.

Spreading its wings, the dinosaur took flight.

Thus the flying began. The height was probably thirty, forty meters or so.

Roughly at the speed of a horse's gallop, the *Deinonychus* flew over the grand river of the Rhine.

The castle was already visible several hundred meters ahead. It was surrounded by walls on all four sides.

From the air, it could be seen that the castle was built in the same Roman army style as the stronghold at Raurica.

"So that's the fort Uldin annexed from the empire..."

Godou nodded. There were two *Deinonychuses* swimming leisurely on the surface of the water below. One easily got the impression of eels because only the slender outline from head to tail was visible.

"Do these things really like water?"

"Yes. Although their movements are not impeded in drier places, they do become more nimble and lively near sources of water."

Godou recalled the incident of slaying the divine beast at the Arno River. According to Clotilde's explanation, these beasts really had an affinity for water.

"By the way, how many of these beasts are there roughly?"

"Probably ten at the moment. I'm not too sure about the exact number."

The number of divine beasts could be regarded as Uldin's combat potential.

Godou simply asked without expectation but Clotilde answered with surprising readiness. Did she have no intention of keeping the information a secret, or was she providing false intelligence? Which was it?

During their conversation, they had already reached the airspace above the castle before Godou realized.

Indeed, the structure was similar to the stronghold at Raurica. There were roughly five long and narrow buildings with a plaza and headquarters in the center.

Controlling the pterosaur, Clotilde descended slowly to the plaza.

As the hind legs landed with a "clang," the two wings shrunk back into the short front limbs. The dinosaur divine beast maintained its crouched posture to allow its rider and Godou to dismount.

A black-haired man approached with a smile on his face.

"You've finally arrived! Hahaha, let us drink heartily throughout the night until dawn!"

Naturally, the man proposing such nonsense in broad daylight was the godslayer Uldin.

"I asked you to tell me your name the next time we meet. Come, comrade, time to fulfill that promise!"

"Kusanagi—Godou."

Uldin's cheerful temperament was unconcerned with formalities and his magnetic personality felt rather charismatic.

Admitting to himself that the man did possess a certain charm, Godou briefly introduced his own name.

Uldin ordered a long table to be brought out to the plaza.

The Hunnic godslayer Uldin declared generously:

"Today we have a special guest here! Bring out all the food and wine!"

The people who appeared to be servants began to work efficiently upon hearing his orders.

A table was moved outside and chairs were arranged neatly with a clatter. Then with highly experienced motions, they laid various objects onto the dining table: jugs of wine; plates of meat; bowls of fruit such as pomegranate, peaches and figs; wheat bread; large amounts of cheese; roasted onions; etc.

Did they hold banquets like this often? These people worked with great familiarity.

The men and women working as servants numbered roughly thirty. When Godou tried asking Uldin, the answer he got was that "Rather than selling them, I think it's better to have these guys work for me."

Confronted with the fact that this man's occupation was " invasion and plundering," Godou frowned.

Then he asked about something that occurred to him by chance.

"So, is this forest the place used to raise these dragons?"

"Yeah. These beasts don't live too long. They mostly die after one or two years. I need to constantly replace them."

Supposing Uldin was not lying, he had just divulged a major secret.

The so-called equestrian tribes were nomadic peoples after all. Since they were apparently steeped in the ways of raising animals, Godou tried to ask—

"So, there may be cases when they might run away unnoticed..."

"Well, occasionally. Roughly a month earlier, two of them went missing. They probably died somewhere in the forest."

Godou's prying attempts ended up obtaining information from Uldin that could not be ignored.

Weren't there two *Deinonychuses* that had appeared in modern Tuscany?

This did match the facts. Godou secretly nodded to himself.

While chatting over this and similar topics, the banquet's preparations were ready. Godou and Uldin sat together at the center of the long table. Waiting on them, the servants stood quietly in the surroundings.

"This isn't lively enough. Whats-your-name over there, go fetch those other fellows!"

Uldin called out again.

Several minutes later, fancily dressed beauties had gathered. There were blue-eyed blondes, those bearing the Roman characteristics of black hair and brown eyes, silver-haired women, and brunettes. There were even black ladies and oriental women of Uldin's ethnicity. It was like a great racial melting pot.

The beauties poured wine into two cups and handed them to the two godslayers.

Taking the cup, Uldin took a great gulp in one breath. Godou declined the wine and asked:

"Are they all your servants? They're all quite beautiful."

"No, they're not servants. They're all my women, get it? Basically what people call lovers."

Uldin's matter-of-fact answer caused Godou to go "What!?" and almost fell over in his seat.

"Don't openly ask about this obvious-as-heck stuff, comrade. Isn't it a bit awkward?"

"W-What is the meaning of this!? You mean every single one of these girls is your lover!?"

"Yeah, of course. All twelve of them are my women. Well, I can understand how you feel. You must have many questions."

Nodding, Uldin finished his wine.

One of his lovers instantly refilled his empty cup with wine.

"For a man like me, this harem is a bit lacking in scale. That must be what you're thinking, comrade? However, I don't want to be tied down too much."

Uldin's unexpected answer caused Godou to be flabbergasted.

With a serious expression, Uldin continued:

"Rather than increasing their numbers meaninglessly, these women represent the very best I've picked."

"What kind of joke is this!? Twelve people are more than enough in scale!"

Godou tried as hard as he could to retort against this tyrant who kept downing wine, cup after cup.

Furthermore, wine during this time period was usually prepared by diluting with water. However, judging from the intensity of the color and fragrance of the wine, Uldin was clearly drinking undiluted wine.

He was apparently quite a drinker. On the other hand, Godou simply drank water.

Although he was currently in ancient Gaul, Godou had no intention of contravening modern Japan's underage drinking laws.

Next, one of the many lovers brought forth skewers of roasted pork.

Feeling it would be rude to decline this as well, Godou ate some as appropriate. Although the pork was roasted with only salt for seasoning, the taste was actually quite good.

Uldin continued to speak as Godou stuffed himself with food.

"Hmm, well, to be honest, I do have other wives apart from these girls. Comrade, now is a good opportunity for me to make introductions."

Other wives apart from these twelve lovers? As Godou watched in surprise, Uldin waved his hand.

The one who approached was—Clotilde.

She was gallantly clad in armor, leather and a feathered helmet. Her beautiful countenance carried nobility and elegance. All this, combined with her tall physique, contributed to airs like a queen's.

Godou had only had a brief conversation with her, but her personality was probably the very serious type.

It was quite surprising to find out that such a person was Uldin's wife.

Clotilde bowed to the surprised Godou, then spoke to her husband:

"Uldin-sama, it's probably time I should..."

"Yeah, sorry my bad. I'll leave things to you."

Was she entrusted with some kind of task? Clotilde departed the venue.

Mounting the pterosaur she had just ridden with Godou, she took to the skies once more. The banquet continued leisurely for almost an hour.

"By the way, comrade. I've got an important request for you today."

Eating a pomegranate as he listened to the banquet's host, Godou began to get nervous.

This was because of Uldin's personality. Although Godou felt that Uldin's welcome banquet might not have any ulterior motives, the opposite was also possible as speculated.

However, Uldin's request was completely unexpected.

"Are you willing to become king as my proxy?"

"K-King!?"

"I have this fun little idea. To set up proxies as kings on occasion and let them take over the country. Then I'll send them off to conquer other lands to further increase the number of countries under my control."

Uldin casually proposed "taking over the country."

If a normal person had said this, one would simply regard these words as delusional.

However, this man was a Campione who commanded an army of dragons. Furthermore, this was currently a tumultuous era in the ancient world. The entry requirements for becoming a king were much lower than in the modern world.

Considering Uldin, it was possible indeed—

"I established a country not too long ago in the east and even lent my name to the chieftain I established there as my proxy. However, that guy isn't very reliable so I foresee the country heading towards ruin on its own in the near future."

Uldin was talking about the rise and fall of countries as though he were talking about developing business ventures.

He looked quite young in appearance. However, given the examples of the sworn elder sister and Madame Aisha, a Campione's outward appearance was not a good indicator of actual age.

Perhaps this man had accumulated decades of experience—

Godou stared intently at Uldin, causing him to smile in the end.

"Indeed, if my proxy does not possess the requisite mettle, great things cannot be accomplished. Hence, I want to entrust this role to you who are my fellow godslayer. Become king as my proxy!"

"I can't possibly agree to such a request. Besides, why me?"

Godou refused cautiously with a displeased expression at the same time.

They had only encountered each other merely by chance. Why would things come to this?

"I am completely certain, because your taste in women is similar to mine."

"Women!?"

"Yeah. The two girls you had by your side previously, they both looked like indomitable broncos without exception. Despite your young age, you have excellent taste, comrade. In fact, I love that type of women too. Women who only obey subserviently are no fun at all."

"....."

Erica Blandelli and Seishuuin Ena were exactly as he described.

To be able to discern that simply from their faces and appearances, Uldin truly had an extraordinary ability. Could this man possess astounding skills in the realm of female-related matters?

Godou felt impressed at the same time as being surprised. Then he took a deep breath.

This was for accelerating the gears of his mind and body. Although Godou had no intention of entering an argument with Uldin, he was prepared to respond with force if the other side picked a fight. Godou prepared himself for that.

"I understand your well-intentioned invitation, but I'm sorry. I have no intention of agreeing to your proposal."

"Don't decide so quickly. Please enjoy yourself at this castle for a couple months and consider my offer carefully. Despite appearances, I'm actually quite a patient man. I'll give you plenty of time to think over things."

"No, it's not necessary. Let's talk again some other time."

Seeing Godou stand up, Uldin waved his hand lightly.

Understanding his wishes from this single motion, the lovers and servants all swiftly left the area. They must have smelt a fight brewing.

"You probably can't understand even if I tell you, but I'm a pacifist. I don't like unnecessary conflict. Will you allow me to leave?"

"Hey hey, this is getting better and better."

Uldin partially closed his eyes towards Godou the pacifist.

"I, too, am a person who subscribes to a philosophy of avoiding unnecessary conflict as much as possible. For that purpose, I prepared something that has now arrived."

Saying that, he looked up into the sky. As a member of an equestrian tribe, did his sharp vision capture something?

All Godou could see was a black dot flying in approach. After a while, he could see it was a pair of winged *Deinonychuses*.

The two *Deinonychuses* each carried a rider. One was Clotilde while the other was a black-haired woman.

Godou focused his gaze. Apart from the dragon riders, there were additional passengers. Sitting in front of Clotilde on the saddle was Erica, tied up in ropes. In a rare moment, she was biting her lip in an expression of chagrin.

In addition, the black-haired rider was carrying Ena.

Naturally, Ena was also tied up, displaying a strange expression like a playground bully who had lost a fight.

In actual fact, Godou had set off to Uldin's forest with two companions. Their plan was to provide support to Godou, who was inside the castle, regardless of whether he decided to negotiate peace, run away or fight.

"As expected of my wives. Looks like it went off without a hitch . So that's that. Why don't you enjoy your stay a while longer?"

Declaring arrogantly, Uldin cast his gaze towards Godou again. Clearly, the other side had captured hostages. Naturally, Godou could not refuse.

"Just to be on the safe side, I resorted to a petty trick."

Uldin motioned with his eyes. Clotilde jumped down from the back of the pterosaur.

The tall, blonde beauty approached Godou as she drew out a small, bladed tool—a razor.

Godou was surprised. He could sense divine power from Clotilde's razor. Was this also something related to the gods?

While he stared in shock, Clotilde had already arrived before him, swinging the small blade in a flash.

Confronted with the mysterious razor, Godou perceived its incredible sharpness...

Part 2

It was the next morning since Godou was stranded in Uldin's castle.

The accommodations arranged for him here also consisted of quarters for military officer. However, the quarters were surrounded by several guards. Hence, Godou was currently under house arrest.

Furthermore, Godou was the only one detained here. His two companions were not by his side.

Godou had no choice but to kill time on his own. At noon, Erica came by to visit.

"We were taken out by those two women."

Erica explained to Godou with a face full of resentment.

They were the only two occupants of the reception hall in the quarters. There were no guards inside. Superficially, Godou was a guest and not a prisoner, hence he was still given the freedom of such meetings.

"Uldin's wives huh..."

"Yes. Without a doubt, they are powerful warriors who can rival those of the Paladino rank. Even if my uncle or Saint Raffaello were here in support, chances of victory would still be slim."

Godou had already expected Clotilde to be a female warrior.

Furthermore, Erica pointed out that she was apparently a master of "this era's rune magic." In a direct confrontation of sword and magic, Erica and Ena were apparently defeated in quick succession.

Moreover, they were clearly defeated in a merciful manner, unharmed with only their weapons struck down from their hands.

"Is the other woman powerful too?"

"That's Ruska. She... I'm not sure of the details but she's probably a witch. She apparently discovered our location effortlessly."

In the face of such terrifying events, even Erica was showing a frightened expression.

"If Lily and Yuri were here, perhaps we could still offer some resistance..."

Were those two girls here, perhaps they could have discovered the enemy's assault using spirit vision and psychic sensing. Then using witchcraft's disorienting effects to counter the enemy's strength advantage, they might have escaped successfully.

Two were currently missing from the five-member team.

Feeling deeply the effects of that through this incident, Godou and Erica sighed heavily.

"What about you, Godou? Are you still unable to use your authority?"

"Yeah. I never knew a tool like that existed in this world."

Touching his severed bangs, Godou muttered.

Yesterday, Clotilde had swung the razor to cut off a little of his bangs. Immediately after that, he was unable to invoke his authority.

Even when he tried to summon Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, it did not appear in his right hand.

Despite his mental orders for the [Boar] to "destroy this castle," there was no response whatsoever.

"I believe that razor should be a divine artifact related to Samson[13], the biblical judge from the Old Testament. However, discerning the artifact's origins isn't going to recover your power, Godou. How truly vexing."

"How about you and Seishuuin? Did they do anything unusual to you?"

"Things are fine in that regard. We've been offered grand hospitality. Clotilde, Ruska and the other women have been very cordial. Oh well, at least from my perspective as a hostage."

Erica replied in a slightly sardonic tone of voice.

Godou felt relieved. If the two girls were to suffer inhumane treatment, he would never forgive Uldin.

"That guy Uldin seems unexpectedly considerate in this area..."

"A description of daring would not be enough to encapsulate who he is. I believe he is surely a man possessing the disposition to become a great king. Hey Godou, you must know the name of Attila, right?"

"Hmm? Yeah, that's the king who would unify the Huns later."

Godou knew the name from his World History textbook. Erica explained about the man in great detail.

He was reportedly born in a barbaric equestrian tribe. Not only was Attila skilled in war, he was also a great diplomat. He also employed talent based on merit regardless of race.

His Hunnic Empire stretched from the Caspian Sea all the way to the Danube River—covering the areas of western Russia, Eastern Europe and Germany in modern terms.

However, his empire fell apart due to his sudden death. And with that, the Huns disappeared into the annals of history...

Recounting the name of the great king of the barbarians, the Italian girl spoke with a gloomy expression.

"This is what I suspect. In a few decades' time, Uldin will probably help Attila succeed the throne to establish the unified empire of the Huns."

"What are you talking about?"

"Didn't he propose to you, Godou, to 'become king'? If Uldin continues to survive, this enterprise will likely come into fruition."

Making a rather bold hypothesis, Erica continued:

"Furthermore, there is a factual consistency that cannot be overlooked. In the early fifth century, the Huns did indeed have a chieftain named Uldin. In addition, there is also this legend about Attila, which calls him the bearer of the sword that brings victory to its owner, the divine sword of the war god Tyr..."[14]

"....."

Uldin had mentioned that he had lent his name to a man who was currently king.

Furthermore, Uldin's nickname was [Tyr's Sword]. However, Godou still had yet to witness the Hunnic godslayer draw his sword in battle—

Just as Erica had pointed out, there was a consistency in facts that could not be attributed to coincidence.

"Although Attila's active period was quite short, he left extremely deep marks on European history. Whether his existence should be considered good or bad, he was undoubtedly a super important figure in history."

"If he disappeared, the effects on history would be unimaginable..."

"Assuredly. I am currently starting to consider the possibility of Uldin becoming the future Attila. However, he seems to have said he had no desire to become king..."

This speculation was fairly bold but also quite convincing.

Godou began to agitate. Although he could not fight Uldin in his current state, Godou wondered if he should fight when he regained the ability to do so.

"No one can guarantee that Aisha-san's idea of a corrective force is true. In a work of science fiction, this would probably be a parallel world instead, right? Yeah, so even if history gets changed, it'd generate a second world, leaving the original unchanged."

"In that case, have you considered this? The Madame did not tell us, but in actual fact, she may already know something that could prove the correctness of her hypothesis—"

"I see. Deducing in reverse huh."

"Your Majesty. Ena has brought something for you!"

Just as Godou nodded in agreement with Erica, a cheerful voice called out to him.

Ena happened to be entering the hall at this time. There was also someone accompanying her. Like the Japanese Hime-Miko, she also had black hair.

But unlike Ena's extremely long hair, hers was cut to shoulder-length.

The woman was the blooming beauty who had ridden a pterosaur along with Clotilde yesterday. She seemed to be oriental in race, perhaps born among the Huns or somewhere in Asia. Godou greeted her:

"I remember you are Uldin's wife, is that correct...?"

"Yes. I am Ruska. Since he is not here today, allow me to care for your needs. Are there any inconveniences you would like to be addressed?"

"I'd like to leave this castle."

"Hahaha, unfortunately, this request is denied."

Ruska was a black-haired beauty whose eyes gave off an air of weariness. She spoke concisely and her mood seemed inexplicably depressed. However, she reacted to Godou with laughter and a low-tension. She did not seem like a cold person.

Ena was carrying a large plate of fruit while Ruska held a jar of drinking water in her arms.

"Ruska, where did your husband go?"

"No idea. He is a man who seldom leaves word on where he's going."

"Ah, got it, got it. Ena is also the type who doesn't tell people where she's headed."

Erica and Ena were already able to converse intimately with Uldin's other wife. In this regard, they really had first class social skills and natural instincts respectively, having established excellent interpersonal relationships without any apparent difficulties.

"Anyway, Why is His Majesty unable to to use his power?"

"It's the divine artifact. Delilah's Razor."[15]

Ena stared blankly in response to the curt answer, but Erica went "just as expected" and nodded.

"In the Book of Judges in the Bible's Old Testament, Samson was a man with unparalleled, supernatural might. His source of strength, his hair, was lost because he was betrayed by his lover, Delilah. So this is the divine artifact that recreates this story?"

"Yes. Samson's head was shaved clean during his sleep, thus he lost his power."

Ruska gave a grinning smile to Godou whose bangs were cut off a little.

"Uldin had suffered the same before. But he deserved it. Because that razor is a tool that only women can use."

"Was Uldin-san also betrayed by one who shared his bed?"

Ena stared wide-eyed as she asked. Ruska nodded in response.

"He's always behaved like that. Out of my sight, he'd immediately get friendly with other women. On occasion, he'll even take them home and add them to his troupe of lovers."

"But provided it's only 'on occasion,' perhaps there's still hope for him."

Chiming in sarcastically was Erica.

"A certain someone somewhere would 'always' make his target his lover..."

"Based on His Majesty's situation, it's not like his affections wander wantonly. He's always very serious in each case. But only thanks to that, Ena was able to get along so harmoniously with everyone as the fourth, so no complaints there."

In contrast to the critical gaze Erica was giving Godou, Ena was smiling somewhat wryly.

Nevetheless, both were acting in a way that would lead others to misunderstand Kusanagi Godou.

Just as predicted, Ruska's lethargic gaze turned towards Godou as she murmured.

"'Always'... 'The fourth'... Sigh, I knew it..."

"Oh no, that's not true. Although I have no idea why so many girls gather around me, I definitely don't engage in Uldin's problematic behavior."

"Hmm... You are very similar to him—Uldin."

Finding Ruska's words shocking, Godou went "!?" and froze.

"Probably, your personalities are fundamentally similar. Bold and unusually prone to willful unruliness, yet unexpectedly adept at taking care of others... And skilled in reading people..."

Murmuring with a hollow gaze, Ruska's eyes turned into the color of glass.

Godou was shocked.

This was a change that he had often witnessed in Yuri—a Hime-Miko who had strongly inherited the blood of the Divine Ancestors. In other words, Ruska was also a distant descendant of the Divine Ancestors!?

Erica and Ena exchanged glances. They must have realized it already in the previous day's battle.

That was why Erica had said she was "not sure of the details."

"The number of girls accepted is different... The world you were born and raised in is different huh. Hmm?"

Ruska murmured as if receiving revelations through spirit vision.

However, she was suddenly puzzled as she gazed directly into Godou's face.

"A man from a different world... A godslayer who could not possibly exist here... Who are you?"

"Yeah, I came from somewhere quite far away."

Godou nodded emphatically to agree with Ruska's description that he "could not possibly exist here."

Indeed, he really should not linger too long in this era. Wasn't it the same for Salvatore Doni and Madame Aisha?

Should he discuss this with her? —Just as Godou wondered...

"So you're here, Ruska."

Another person arrived. This time it was Clotilde.

"Uldin-sama cannot be found anywhere... Do you know anything?"

"No, I have no idea. No one has seen him since this morning."

"Really? That guy came over to visit me early in the morning."

Godou recalled what had happened a couple hours earlier.

Morning came very early in ancient Gaul for there were many who rose with the sun. Although Erica remained tardy in rising from bed, Godou was already accustomed to rising at 5am back in the modern world. Nevertheless, there was nothing to do here even if he got up early.

Uldin had visited at that time. After a brief chat with Godou, he had left.

Clotilde demanded forcefully:

"Did he say anything about where he was going!?"

"No, nothing about that... However, he was a bit annoying in the way he kept asking me about Aisha-san—the Holy Maiden in the town we were living in."

Godou had no intention of obediently coughing up information about Madame Aisha.

Hence, he had answered coldly and sloppily as though he were dealing with Salvatore Doni, thus sending Uldin away. Hearing about this, Ena suddenly murmured to herself.

"Just maybe. Uldin-san headed by himself to Raurica, intending to bring Aisha-san back here by force? Uldin-san really lusts after women, right?"

Rather than a deduction, Ena's suggestion was more of a cheeky joke.

However, Clotilde's reaction was considerably intense. Her shoulders shook as she went "Guh" and stared straight at the Japanese Hime-Miko.

"Only with someone like my husband, Uldin-sama, would that sort of thing be... That sort of thing—"

"Oh sorry. Ena wasn't serious just now. It's completely baseless, don't you worry."

In a rare moment, the innocent Ena was actually panicking.

She seemed to be saying "What a disaster, I never intended to bully her like that" with troubled-looking eyes as she gazed at Clotilde whose power had vastly overwhelmed her in battle.

On the other hand, Erica crossed her arms in thoughtful contemplation.

"But now that you mention it, I do feel like he is the type who might do something like that. Coincidentally, it happened precisely after he resolved the pending issue of capturing Godou."

Clotilde suddenly looked up as a result of Erica's words.

She was staring into space with a terrifying expression. Her whole body was shaking intensely.

Ruska looked at her with a lethargic gaze. Soon after, she sighed as if finding things troublesome.

"If it really bothers you that much, why not go and have a look?
"

Thus spoke the witch who wielded unfathomable powers.

Part 3

Although the honorary title of "Madame" was dedicated to Aisha, she was not of noble birth.

She was born in northern India during its British colonial era and grew up as a daughter from one of those ubiquitous families of low-ranked castes.

Her turning point in life occurred when she was seven years old .

At the time, she was hired as a maid and entered the household of an Englishman who ran a diamond mining business.

As an adolescent girl, Aisha was deeply loved by the master's young daughter. When it came time for the family to return to England, she convinced Aisha with repeated entreaties to accompany them home overseas.

However, given Aisha's humble origins, her life as a maid in England was not completely happy.

She frequently suffered hardship and all sorts of discrimination.

Nevertheless, Aisha was naturally born with a cheerful and optimistic personality. To go even further, in contrast to her slim and delicate figure, she possessed the resilience in mental strength to survive in any sort of country.

Not treating hardship as hardship was precisely Aisha's characteristic.

But when Aisha reached seventeen years of age in England, a series of tragedies befell the family she served. First, the master suddenly passed away. After that, even the daughter who inherited his estate died as a result of illness.

However, the daughter made very considerate arrangements for Aisha.

She bestowed her massive funds and stockholdings to "the wonderful friend who had served her over the long years."

However, Aisha had lost her maid occupation and was all alone without any relatives.

How was she going to live the rest of her life henceforth?

Not dwelling too deep into pessimism was another of Aisha's good qualities. After that, hoping to calm her tumultuous feelings through traveling, she set off enthusiastically on a trip to Greece. This happened to be the time of the great commotion from Heinrich Schliemann and his wife's discovery of Troy.

Aisha was originally a servant girl who never had a chance to be educated.

However, thanks to the deceased master's generosity during his lifetime, she was able to read the books in his library. Furthermore, while helping the daughter in her studies, Aisha also learned the corresponding knowledge and more.

Aisha particularly loved history and geography.

Hence, she chose the land of Greece as her tourist destination.

There, she had encountered the [Heretic Goddess], Persephone. Left without a choice, Aisha managed to slay her first deity—

Dating from her time as a nameless girl, over a hundred years had already passed.

And now, Aisha was situated in ancient Gaul.

She was an adventurer who traversed gaps between countries and eras. However, her adventurous journeys were always accompanied by disaster. Augusta Raurica was facing an unprecedented crisis.

At noon of this day, black pterosaurs flew over the skies above Raurica.

There were three in total. As their master, Uldin was riding on the back of one of them. Ever since Kusanagi Godou had set off for Uldin's main base, a number of days had already passed.

"Looks like Kusanagi-san did not succeed..."

To resolve conflicts peacefully. That was what Kusanagi Godou had said before he left.

However, the young Campione from the modern age had failed . Perhaps he had lost his life in a battle against Uldin. Maybe the same fate befell the two girls who were his companions.

As soon as Aisha imagined their unfortunate fates, tears overflowed from her eyes.

"We had become friends through such rare circumstances... Kusanagi-san, I shall avenge your regrets for you...!"

Clenching her fist tightly, she looked up into the sky.

Were it nighttime, she would have sworn an oath to the stars. However, there were currently two pterosaurs flying back and forth, freely over Raurica's airspace. Furthermore, they were making high-pitched shrieks.

KAAAAAAH! KAAAAAAH! KAAAAAAH! KAAAAAAH! KAAAAAAH!

Overwhelmed and intimidated by the pterosaurs' flying and shrieking, the citizens on the ground were trembling nonstop.

Augusta Raurica's population was roughly twenty thousand. During this time period, that would have been quite a large-scale city. All the citizens were terrified by the divine beasts' arrival and were cowering in fright.

On the other hand, the pterosaurs' master, Uldin, remained casual and composed.

Only the pterosaur he was riding did not make a racket. With its wings spread wide, the pterosaur glided slowly through the air above Raurica. Mounted on its back, Uldin surveyed the city's condition from above in a unhurried manner.

It was as though he were appraising the value of treasure that had already fallen into his hands.

Feeling a weight in her heart, Aisha began to ponder.

Now that Kusanagi Godou was not present, there were no warriors capable of engaging Uldin in battle. Although she was a Campione like him as well, Aisha was not skilled in fighting.

—At the very least, she had to assist the Roman army in the stronghold.

She must encourage them in their fight against the pterosaurs and heal their injuries.

Deciding that, Aisha quickened her footsteps. She had just left town and was heading towards the stronghold. She was about a kilometer away.

In contrast to her frail appearance, Aisha was actually quite athletic and fleet-footed.

As she increased her running speed, the path ahead was suddenly blocked. A black pterosaur had made a rapid descent from the sky. Furthermore, there was a rider on its back.

"I've been searching for you, Holy Maiden. If I couldn't find you , my original plan was to break every house here, one by one."

The man speaking from the pterosaur's saddle was Uldin of course.

Aisha glared at the pterosaur's rider sharply. However, due to her inborn gentle temperament, she was not very intimidating.

"For what reason do you seek me?"

"Nothing much. I just wanted to have you in my grasp before I attacked the town seriously."

"I-In your grasp!?"

"Yeah. I want to make you my woman no matter what. It'd be a shame if you escaped during the chaos of battle, so I wanted to get it done beforehand."

As always, Uldin made a shocking declaration with a cheerful tone of voice.

"If you refuse, I won't force you to become mine. But you still need to come with me. Once you start living by my side for a while , I'm sure you'll change your mind."

"Well well... That's really quite some confidence you have there. "

"That's basically how it always goes. Those women who hate me at first, they pretty much end up falling in love after a while. They desperately cling to their obstinacy as though they are trying to hide their change in feelings."

As Uldin laughed with joy, unbelievably, his words did not sound especially repulsive.

He was not putting up a front or bragging. It felt like he was talking about things in a matter-of-fact manner. Aisha realized that Uldin possessed undeniable charm.

However, faced with the crisis of her chastity, Aisha could not possibly give in so obediently.

"My utmost apologies. I have no intention of joining anyone's harem."

"Not even mine?"

"Indeed. Granted you may be a rare hero, godslayer Uldin... But considering our status, you and I are equals. Hence, there is no reason for me to follow you!"

Aisha tried to speak as sternly as she could.

In addition, she began to increase the magical power in her Campione body with a cry of "Yah!"

If this continued, she was going to be taken away by force. Despite the fact that Aisha did not possess authorities suited for fighting, she did not want to submit without resisting. If she did not oppose with all her might—

"This power... Are you..."

"Kusanagi-san and you are not the only godslayers. Besides, I already have over a century's experience since I first slew a deity. Some have even called me 'Queen.'"

In actual fact, Aisha had no confidence at all that she could defeat Uldin in a direct confrontation.

Nevertheless, Aisha still held her head high and puffed out her voluptuous chest, giving her best effort to look strong. No weapon could seize instantaneous victory in a situation like this. This was the wisdom she had acquired in her century-plus life as a Devil King.

In response, Uldin glared down sharply at Aisha from his saddle.

"I knew you were no ordinary person from the start... So you call yourself a godslayer."

The pterosaur flapped its wings forcefully and began to soar once more.

Returning to the skies, the Hunnic Devil King declared loudly to his peer on the ground.

"Indeed, I can sense that sort of presence. However, that alone is not enough to convince me. Let me test your powers, how's that?"

Uldin smiled fearlessly and reached out.

He took an arrow from the quiver hanging on his saddle and threw it towards the ground. The arrow flew with a "whoosh" as though it had been shot by a bow, embedding itself into the earth. Right before Aisha's eyes.

Immediately, the arrow suddenly burst into flames.

The resulting fire instantly turned into explosive flames, incinerating Aisha's surroundings intensely.

A fire god's authority—This must be the power he had used to counter the sun god's spear that Kusanagi Godou had summoned several days earlier.

Aisha deduced calmly while surrounded by a roaring inferno.

Despite her frail appearance, Aisha's womanly body did not perspire a single drop of sweat, let alone suffer a single burn.

Not only that, her white overcoat was not even soiled by a speck of dust.

"Oh..."

Gazing down at the completely unharmed Aisha, Uldin picked up his bow.

With lightning speed, he repeated the motions of nocking the arrow, drawing the bow and aiming thrice, firing three arrows in succession.

The three arrows all flew towards Aisha's heart while the flames devoured her.

However, all the arrows passed through Aisha's body and simply struck the ground behind her.

"What a wonderful skill. However, what if I did this?"

Uldin muttered as he snapped his fingers.

The raging flames suddenly vanished and were replaced by something flying towards the ground. Two seven-meter-long pterosaurs—*Deinonychuses* with their front limbs turned into wings.

These were the two pterosaurs which had been flying over town , sending the citizens into a state of panic.

Unnoticed, they had returned to their master's side and were now diving rapidly towards the ground!

Using the "terrible claws" on their hind legs to attack, they intended to cruelly slash Aisha's slender body apart.

However, their claws simply passed through Aisha's body.

Seeing this occur, Uldin whistled loudly. The two pterosaurs returned to the air once more. All of them were watching Aisha on the ground as though in amazement.

"What trickery is this astounding skill? It's like fighting against air."

Uldin praised in admiration.

Aisha smiled with a calm and composed expression as though she were praying. This was the result of her using this time period's "force of attachment" to correct the results of phenomena.

But under the current circumstances, that was as far as it could manage.

Presently speaking, Aisha did not have any authorities that could be used to attack.

Although the charisma authority was quite potent, it was not very effective against gods and Campiones. Unless the opponent was showing a massive opening, it was not worth trying.

Then how could she break through this encirclement?

Just as Aisha pondered desperately, cover fire was shot in support. The massive bowguns standing on the castle walls of the stronghold one kilometer away—the ballistae.

Massive arrows were being shot at Uldin and the pterosaurs.

However, they were ineffective against the divine beasts. The pterosaur's sturdy outer skin deflected all the shots. Nevertheless, the soldiers refused to admit defeat and prepared many ballistae to keep firing continuously.

The three pterosaurs began to feel annoyed and started to evade the attack of the arrows.

At the same time, the castle gates opened and a small team of roughly forty soldiers made a sortie.

They were rushing forth in a straight line, presumably intending to rescue Aisha.

"Getting in the way of my romantic pursuits, huh? No matter. I guess I'll need to rely on a greater power to catch you who has turned into air."

Sitting astride the pterosaur, the Hunnic Devil King declared briskly.

"I will take my leave for now, but I'll return once night falls. When the time comes, I will surely make you submit obediently!"

Leading the two pterosaurs, Uldin flew towards the western sky.

She had apparently survived the battle. Relieved, Aisha relaxed her entire body and collapsed into a sitting position.

Soon after, the small contingent of soldiers approached.

"Holy Maiden! Are you injured!?"

The small team's leader hurried over. Unlike the citizens, he had not trembled in fear.

Instead, he resembled an excited racehorse. Aisha had noticed. Due to her repeated usage of the charisma authority to encourage them, the soldiers had developed absolute loyalty towards her. Even their fear towards the pterosaurs was easily forgotten.

"Does that man intend to take the Holy Maiden's life...? What a bastard!"

"Oh no. Uldin-san does not want to kill me. Instead, he said he wanted to capture me to make me his wife. So there shouldn't be any danger—"

In an attempt to appease the soldiers' excitement, she told them the truth.

But unexpectedly, these words made them even more fired up.

"How dare he intend to make the Holy Maiden his wife?" "That barbarian bastard, how dare he harbor such delusional dreams!?" " Next time he comes, we better teach him a lesson..." "Kill him! Kill that Uldin!"

Hearing the soldiers yelling in a clamor, Aisha went "Oh dear" in puzzlement.

What an unexpected development, but no matter. Then a certain soldier brought her a horse and helped her mount.

This soldier yelled out as he started escorting Aisha towards the stronghold.

"We must protect the Holy Maiden! Everyone, let's lay down our lives!"

OHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

Angry roars erupted in response, sounding as though they could cause an earthquake. Meanwhile, Aisha could feel their goodwill as they escorted her towards the stronghold. Rocking on the horse, Aisha murmured to herself:

"Perhaps, I've done it again...?"

Part 4

Like the city of Raurica, Uldin's castle was also built on the Rhine's shores.

This was for defending against foreign invaders. Reportedly, it was customary for the Roman army to swiftly send soldiers to swiftly repel enemy attacks.

The Rhine's river water not only provided the citizens with the blessings of water but also stood as a natural boundary and defensive line.

The water surface of this grand river was now showing the battle between two godslayers.

They were the ancient godslayer Uldin and Madame Aisha respectively.

Uldin's "first wife," Ruska, was using a spell to project on the water surface what was happening far away in Augusta Raurica.

"Fortunately, it's a town that I know. Otherwise, there would be no way of viewing it."

Ruska spoke softly in an aloof tone of voice.

The make-shift screen on the water by the shore was showing images of the great tumult caused by Uldin's flames and divine beasts. Nevertheless, all of the attacks had simply passed through Madame Aisha's body.

"What on earth is that...?"

"It must be Madame Aisha's authority, right?"

Erica and Ena were baffled. Even as a Campione, Kusanagi Godou was entirely clueless. However, Ruska used her glass-colored eyes to gaze at the Madame and began to speak slowly:

"The other godslayer who is not supposed to exist here... Protected by a power capable of reducing to nothingness phenomena that were supposed to happen, correcting all phenomena even if they had already happened..."

"Eh?"

Godou wondered if he had misheard because he caught Ruska saying the word "correcting."

"It's the power that maintains her attachment to this place—Or rather, this world? The force that attaches her to a world where she should not exist. That's what it feels like."

Apparently an oracle delivered through spirit vision. Ruska spoke in a blank tone of voice.

"She is only impervious to calamities and powers in progress. Hence the impossible was able to occur just now. However, due to Uldin's keen instincts... He ultimately noticed after all."

The two Campiones' fight was projected on the water surface.

Uldin had stated "I'll be back once night falls" and left with his pterosaurs. With that, the incident was temporarily settled for now .

"Even the full-powered attacks of a godslayer like Uldin could not neutralize that miraculous power... I'm guessing he left because he sensed that."

Hearing Ruska's words, Godou began to think.

Very likely, Madame Aisha was actually able to control, to some extent, the "corrective force" she had mentioned before? That was probably the reason why she adhered to that suspicious philosophy of hers and indulged freely in her time traveling—

Speaking of which, this sort of live playback really was quite a convenient spell.

Although Liliana could do something similar, she could only show images. In contrast, Ruska's live playback included sound.

Ruska's powers were superior in this and other regards. However, too much convenience was sometimes quite troublesome too.

Godou took a glance at Clotilde.

The blonde beauty's face was locked in some sort of mental impasse. She continued to stare intently at the water surface which no longer reflected any images. During the battle just now, she had listened to many problematic statements.

'I want to make you my woman no matter what.'

'Once you start living by my side for a while, I'm sure you'll change your mind.'

Etc etc. Uldin had said quite a lot to Madame Aisha.

Clotilde's shoulders shook as she murmured to herself.

"Not only does he have us as wives, but also the other dozen women surrounding him, yet he dares make a move on another woman...!"

Although her voice was not loud, it was a mournful lament.

Rather than anger, it was more the expression of mixed feelings. As a result, the mood instantly grew heavy. Godou could not casually offer comforting words to her either.

Seeing Clotilde struck down by such a blow, Godou felt rather somber.

(Even a master warrior on Paolo-san's level cannot withstand this sort of matter.)

(That's only natural. No matter what time period, humans' greatest sources of stress are love, money and health without exception. Even someone like my uncle has started worrying about the problem of losing hair.)

(R-Really?)

(He really is unexpectedly concerned with his image and presentation...)

(Speaking of murder motives, they all boil down to a few causes like love disputes and money.)

Seeing Erica shrugging as she explained, Ena also whispered in a rare, sighing tone of voice.

The trio were all whispering in consideration of Clotilde, naturally.

(Hey, Your Majesty, can we talk?)

The black-haired Hime-Miko was looking at Godou with a troubled expression when she suddenly spoke up.

Although she usually behaved with cheerful optimism, Ena would display a Yamato Nadeshiko's docility on occasion. Godou was quite surprised to see her making that kind of expression.

(So. Even if Your Majesty decides to go somewhere, even if you leave for many years, Ena will resolve herself to wait for you at home no matter what...)

(Uh sure.)

(As a result, to stop Ena from stabbing Your Majesty when welcoming your return, Your Majesty really must show appropriate restraint in womanizing outside, okay? This will surely be tough...)

(.....)

(Hearing Ruska-san describe Your Majesty as very similar to Uldin-san, Ena can understand very well. Ena has always been very aware of similarities between people.)

(You feel that way too, Ena-san? What a coincidence, I actually have the same feeling as well.)

Erica instantly nodded in agreement with her companion's words.

(If Godou were born in this era, he'd probably turn out with the same character? His self-styled pacifism is simply a tenet branded by modern society, isn't it?)

(So true. Yeah, it's really a great thing that Ena and Erica-san were able to come here together this time.)

(Indeed that's true. Because we are both here, we can prevent any opportunities for strange women to hang around Godou.)

(.....)

Realizing he would simply bring about his own demise if he were to raise his objections, Godou endured and remained silent. In actual fact, all of Kusanagi Godou's "bastard" behavior resulted from the girls' own tolerance and goodwill.

Then Godou turned his gaze involuntarily and found Ruska comforting Clotilde.

"Why not just stab him mercilessly to take out your anger? After all, he's not going to die."

"S-So ordinary blades are really ineffective against Uldin-sama?"

"Yes. I was quite angry once and stabbed a spear into his flank. Although it was probably quite painful, he not only did not die but also had no serious injuries either. Now that's truly vexing."

"So basically, that's not going to make him mend his ways..."

The two beauties' conversation was gradually veering off in a radical direction.

Were such excessive reactions of ancient people the result of living in borderlands like Gaul? Or perhaps, it should be seen as the harsh side of Ruska and Clotilde's natures?

(Godou, absolutely do not forget the conversation just now, for I hope you can learn a lesson from it. If you don't keep yourself in check, perhaps we may turn out like them as well.)

(.....)

Godou felt the bottom of his stomach convulsing in pain in response to Erica's whispering grumbles. At the same time, he listened to the two ancient beauties conversing dangerous topics.

"The only ones capable of terminating godslayers are gods or their fellow godslayers..."

"Yes, indeed. But no matter which side, they are all rare existences. However, when that man is backed into a corner, he always fights back as normal."

"If that's the case, if only there were a godslayer right here..."

"Indeed. If only a godslayer were here..."

Clotilde turned her gaze meaningfully towards Godou.

...Realizing their intent, Godou sighed. If things were left alone, Augusta Raurica would be trampled by that man while Madame Aisha was also going to fall into danger.

Since things had developed to this point, there was really no way to avoid a duel against Uldin.

In that case—Godou motioned to his negotiator with a glance.

"So, shall we confirm the terms and conditions? Just so you know, the price for hiring Kusanagi Godou definitely does not come cheap."

Comprehending Godou's intentions, Erica immediately spoke up.

At the castle's plaza, Clotilde swung a pickaxe and dug out a small sack.

It contained a small blade—Delilah's Razor—and a small lock of hair. This was Godou's severed hair from yesterday.

Clotilde placed the hair on the ground and pressed her index finger on it.

With a flash of radiance from her fingertip, a symbol resembling a letter from the Latin alphabet appeared. Then the letter turned into burning flames, devouring the hair. It appeared to be a runic symbol for incineration.

"This releases the razor's curse. With that, Kusanagi-sama's authority is restored."

Clotilde reported to Godou who was standing quietly beside her.

Severing a person's hair would seal their authority. This was the divine artifact named Delilah's Razor. Apparently, one must burn the severed hair in order to neutralize the effect.

The rune's flames were small but intense. In mere seconds, the hair was completely consumed by the fire.

Immediately, Godou's body gave off a sound akin to glass breaking. An indescribable feeling coursed through his entire body and he understood that his authority had been released.

"If you want to go by boat, you can take one from inside the town. That's the fastest way."

"That would help greatly. Thank you, Ruska."

"However, it'd be great if you could lend out those pterosaurs. Riding them to fly in the sky seems quite fun. It also looks faster than a boat."

The trio had gone to pick up their luggage and returned.

Erica expressed her thanks to Ruska who was standing in front. On the other hand, Ena made a suggestion.

"I'd advise against it, because those beasts can suddenly go berserk. Even for us, we almost never ride them without Uldin nearby."

"Oh I see, that's a shame. But if there's a chance in the future, please teach me how to ride them."

Declined by Ruska with a wry smile, Ena took the opportunity to make a promise. Then Godou's group was taken to where the boats were moored.

The Rhine's source came from the Alps mountain range.

In terms of modern place names, this river ran through Switzerland from east to west, then flowed from south to north to trace out the boundary between Germany and France, towards Holland.

Even in ancient times, the shipping industry relying on this water route was already quite developed and prosperous.

Ena was the first to jump nimbly onto the large cargo boat that was tied to the river shore. Erica followed at an elegant pace and Godou got on last.

As a side note, Ruska's final parting words were also quite radical.

"Well then, we'll entrust the rest to you. I hope you will fight with the intent to kill. Please do not show any mercy."

"I don't think I have the room to show mercy in the first place... But are you sure that's fine? If that Uldin guy dies—"

Although Godou brought up common sense in a matter-of-fact way, Ruska shook her head and answered:

"No, if you don't fight with the intent to kill, you won't be able to corner him. Without the intent to kill... I truly hope you can prepare yourself to fight with the intent to kill your opponent."

"....."

Perhaps it was because she had spent so many years following that ridiculous man and a godslayer to boot?

Although Godou had no intention of sympathizing with Uldin, he reflected on himself and sighed.

"O spirits of water. I beseech you to bestow special protection upon these people."

Clotilde invoked magic. Once again, her fingertip shone with the radiance of runic symbols.

"May your journey be blessed with safe passage. All you need to do is follow the river downstream and the boat will naturally reach its destination."

She had apparently cast protection to prevent the boat from capsizing along the way. Furthermore, she was aiding the man who was about to battle the husband she loved deeply. With these complicated thoughts and feelings, Godou bowed his head.

With that, the boat set sail, carrying the three moderners along with complicated feelings of hate and love.

"This is heavy responsibility in all sorts of ways..."

As the boat advanced forward swiftly, Godou quietly muttered to himself.

Part 5

The boat's size was apparently large enough for ten adults to sit with room to spare.

Used to riding small wooden vessels, Ena initially took up the oars to row.

But she soon realized it was unnecessary. Even without anyone in control, the boat automatically remained balanced and evaded rocks on its own.

No mistake about it, this was all thanks to Clotilde's protection spell.

"This is so interesting and it's great that the speed is so fast!"

"This is much faster than riding galloping horses over the road. So Godou, have you made a decision regarding the earlier problem you were facing?"

"You mean how seriously I should fight Uldin?"

Sitting with Erica and Ena and facing the wind blowing across from the river's shore, Godou began to ponder.

The Hunnic godslayer Uldin was believed to have certain connections to the barbarian king, Attila, who was about to enter the historical stage in the near future. If he were killed, or simply injured seriously, there could be serious effects on the future.

And even from a modern perspective, one might find him sympathetic in a certain way.

Rather than tyrannical, he was more of a man who caused trouble for others.

However, if Uldin, who treated "invasion and plundering" as his daily life, were left to do as he pleased, the twenty thousand inhabitants of Augusta Raurica were going to be swept into a tragic fate.

Even though such tragedies were probably quite common in the ancient world—

In the end, Godou could not stand back and feign ignorance. Hence, he spoke with certainty.

"It's okay. If anything bad happened... History's corrective force will find a way to resolve it!"

"As expected of Your Majesty. Now that's the way to go!"

"Somehow I get this feeling that things have calmed down somewhat when they're supposed to calm down..."

Ena offered her support with a cheerful smile while Erica shrugged rather sardonically.

"Well, I think I now understand the grounds for Madame Aisha's hypothesis, so let's look forward to that unknown power for now."

"Yeah, it's all thanks to Ruska-san."

After all, Godou was not going to gamble to such an extent purely on hope and speculation.

Hence, he was filled with gratitude for his good fortune to be able to meet an accomplished spirit vision user in this era.

Furthermore, he recalled his companions in the modern era who were not present—Yuri and Liliana.

If only he could return to the modern world to reunite with them as soon as possible...

Meanwhile, his two companions were discussing the upcoming battle that would take place several hours later.

"Well then, let's discuss battle tactics against Uldin-san."

"He is a Campione who possesses a number of combat authorities, or more accurately, authorities suited for combat... In terms of the inclination of his powers, he's actually quite similar to Marquis Voban. However, he's much younger than the Marquis."

Ena suggested and Erica followed.

"Based on age, I'd say the experienced Marquis would be stronger. However, in terms of bodily strength, Uldin should have the upper hand."

"Also, he is someone who has defeated a Hindu god and a Mesopotamian dragon."

"Don't forget about the war god Tyr. That authority is apparently his trump card."

"...? When did you two find out about all this?"

The two girls were talking about Uldin's authorities as if they already knew everything.

Struck with a sense of dissonance by this conversation, Godou questioned only to receive a nonchalant answer.

"Ruska-san told us when we were retrieving the luggage just now."

"As part of the terms for sending you to fight, we demanded that they provide full support for Kusanagi Godou's victory, remember? As one of the conditions, I asked her to tell us the three authorities he used the most frequently."

"...That's really quite clever."

On this trip, Godou found himself encountering too many things that struck too close to home for comfort.

Since Uldin brought it all upon himself, Godou did not pity him . Nevertheless, Godou still felt a chill down his spine.

"So Godou, just as a safety precaution, let me use [Instruction] magic to inform you of the many things I found out from Ruska."

"The myths of the gods that Uldin-san defeated... Those that people sing about in this age. It would be a problem if the stories are different from the modern ones."

Godou was currently sitting on a wooden barrel that served as a chair.

Erica approached and sat down on the same barrel, ending up with their bodies pressed intimately together. Then the blonde beauty even went as far as to lean the weight of her self-indulgent body tightly against him.

At the same time, Ena also came to Godou's side. Although she did not press against him, she was within arm's length.

"So this is how it goes. Who will you entrust with this task... Hurry up and decide."

"Yes yes. Whether Ena or Erica-san, either of us can pass on the knowledge to Your Majesty. So, either side is able...?"

Erica was teasing with a slightly miffed expression. In contrast, Ena was asking shyly. Forced to make a choice, Godou stared wide-eyed.

Naturally, he understood what they were proposing, but his thoughts froze.

Then Erica continued:

"Of course, since Ena-san is perfectly capable of fulfilling this role, I will respect your decision, Godou? However, I do hope you can show me some consideration."

"Con... sideration?"

"Yes. No matter what, I am the one who stands as Kusanagi Godou's lawful wife. I am the woman who has shared the greatest number of your trials and tribulations. Hence, it is my wish that you could respect me a little more."

Erica continued to show anger on her face.

However, Godou realized that her rage was actually directed at herself. She was probably angry at herself for relying on past merits to coerce Godou's decision instead of using her own attractiveness.

This was nothing like Erica's usual confidence. This was the kind of unease she was feeling.

Erica understood that she could no longer maintain a clear advantage against a rival as formidable as Seishuuin Ena. Currently, Erica was sitting on Godou's right, leaning tightly against him. However, rather than seducing him, it felt more like she was trying to hide her own unease.

In fact, since earlier, she had been holding Godou's hand tightly with an insecure expression.

Witnessing Erica's superficially aggressive stance, coupled with the vulnerability she normally did not display, Godou felt a sense of dizziness. If any man could still refuse her harshly at this juncture, then rather than being resolute of will, he must be completely lacking in sensitivity.

"E-Ena hasn't spent a lot of time with Your Majesty like Erica-san, however..."

Godou felt his left hand being pulled. Ena had clasped his hand with a troubled expression.

The Hime-Miko, who should normally be cheerful and lively, was holding Godou's left hand with unease.

"Ena still hopes Your Majesty could really choose her in this kind of situation. To compensate for not being able to accompany you every single moment, Ena hopes to serve Your Majesty whenever by your side..."

Was it because Godou's attention had been diverted towards Erica?

Although it was only for a brief moment, Ena showed an uncharacteristically gloomy expression. Her confidence had fallen greatly. Was it really because of having Erica Blandelli as her opponent in a one-on-one contest? Consequently, Ena's usual optimistic cheerfulness had weakened.

"S-Sorry. If Ena were carrying Your Majesty's baby in her womb now, Ena would be able to act more calmly. But that's already decided to be delayed for the future."

Probably because of her loss of composure, Ena spoke shocking words.

However, her flustered behavior was quite adorable. Godou could not help but recall the words they exchanged during that particular night they had spent alone together. Ena's behavior back then had also strongly stimulated Kusanagi Godou's desire.

On his right and left respectively, Erica and Ena were urging him to make a choice. This situation—

Godou's mind had already lost all sense of calm.

In any case, more than a week had passed since they arrived in that land of Gaul. Thanks to Erica and Ena's "prohibition of stealing ahead" agreement, the two of them had been repeatedly flaunting their appeal at Godou every night—

There were many sleepless nights. Godou was almost reaching the limits of his patience.

"Ho... Hohohohoho... S-Speaking of you two, ever since we arrived here, you've been acting as you pleased, willfully trying to incite me..."

"Godou?" "Your Majesty, what's wrong?"

Ignoring their concerns, Godou broke into laughter.

If anything, it was a state of mania very similar to how one felt after staying up all night. Realizing he could not endure any longer , Godou suddenly changed in attitude and allowed his emotions to explode.

"I already told you before, I'll never do anything like imposing a ranking on you girls!"

"Kyah...!" "Ahhh!?"

Godou first gripped Erica's hand hard in return. Then he pulled Ena's body to his side and made her sit on his lap. The two girls were very surprised as a result.

"My request is very simple. Uldin's fight is coming up next. You two, just assist me as usual. Thanks."

Asserting his will clearly, Godou gazed intently at the two girls before his eyes.

His eyes probably looked as if he wanted to counterattack in full force. Godou could feel himself glaring at the girls more intensely than usual. At the same time, he continued to gaze at them in this manner.

Ena hesitated for a moment in the face of Godou's unusual forcefulness.

Involuntarily, she was intimidated by his vigor and revealed her habit of wanting to retreat from this type of situation. On the other hand, Erica relaxed herself completely in spite of the hesitation she felt.

Gently, she gripped Godou's hand in turn and lowered her gaze as if nodding in consent.

There was no need to listen for her answer. Godou drew his face near and took Erica's lips by force.

"—Mmm!?"

Surprised by Godou's forcefulness, Erica let loose a light moan.

She kissed Godou as if touching their lips together lightly. Unconcerned, Godou continued to seal her mouth with his lips. This continued for seconds, minutes—

Running out of breath, the two released their lips for an instant.

During this moment, Godou and Erica swiftly recovered their breath and began kissing again.

This time, both sides were full of vigor and ended up clashing their teeth together.

"Mmm—Seriously... T-Too much force, Godou... If you don't be more gentle—"

"Sorry. But you two are at fault here. Constantly provoking me.. ."

"Since you were going to change your attitude suddenly, if only you did it earlier... Oh well, whatever. I gladly accept my punishment. Let's continue, okay...?"

This time, the pair exchanged whispers as if engaging in pillow talk, taking longer than when they were catching their breath previously.

Invited by Erica, Godou immediately started kissing again. Erica used her own tongue to search for Godou's tongue, boldly entangling it and feeling about.

Rather than displaying delicate technique, this kiss was performed with daring passion and impulse.

Although Godou was already very used to this, he also recalled the first kiss he shared with Erica, undertaken with reckless

abandon. Erica also seemed to be thinking the same thing, judging from her blissful smile and mesmerized gaze as the Latin girl again released their lips that were intimately pressed together.

However, there was also a tearful girl present. Obviously, that was Ena.

Having lost the first opportunity to a moment of hesitation, Ena was now sitting motionlessly on Godou's lap without a sense of purpose.

"Seishuuin—"

"Ena-san... Please join us if you may, for our king wants you too ."

Faster than Godou, Erica urged Ena to join in.

Indeed, this was very much in the style of a noble salon mistress .

Despite being the girl known as the devil, Erica was simultaneously capable of exuding an aura of maternal instinct whenever she showed care for her companions. This was how she was acting now.

Hearing her call, Ena immediately brought her face close to Godou's.

"Jeez... All Your Majesty and Erica-san care about is enjoying yourselves on your own... Ena hates being left all alone like an outsider."

"Sorry. I couldn't suppress myself no matter what."

"Even Ena can kiss intensely with Your Majesty, you know? Ena doesn't want to be left out..."

Ena pleaded as she went "smooch" with a kiss, pecking Godou's lips lightly. But after repeating this motion a number of times, she started showering a rain of kisses upon Godou's lips nonstop.

In a forceful kiss, Godou covered up Ena's lips and stopped her. Then the Hime-Miko obediently accepted and leaned herself against Godou's body.

Now the situation evolved to one where Godou was pressed intimately against Erica with Ena's weight on top of him.

Sandwiched between the two girls, one on his right and the other in front, Godou could feel through his skin the two girls' equally matched suppleness and weight. At the same time, he kissed with Ena.

Tearfully, Ena responded to Godou as if dispelling her loneliness. When Godou inserted his tongue, she would receive him with her own tongue. When Godou pecked her lips, she would peck Godou's lips in turn.

Furthermore, she would press her weight on him with all her strength. Seeing her act this way, Erica also entrusted all her weight to Godou's body.

"It's time that I also... I should demonstrate to you my undeniable magnanimity as the lawful wife, yes?"

Caressing Godou's face as he kissed Ena, Erica turned his head to face her.

Godou smiled wryly and leaned his lips towards Erica. A long-awaited kiss with someone other than Ena. As their eyes met the instant their lips separated, the blonde beauty chuckled with a smile.

Then it was Ena's turn to get in between them. Snatching ahead of Erica, she planted a kiss on Godou's lips.

Interrupting each other, the two girls opposed each other defiantly. Exchanging gazes competitively, they smiled wryly at the same time. They apparently reached a consensus for a ceasefire .

Bringing their faces towards Godou alternately, they composed their speech.

"The first deity that Uldin defeated was the Mesopotamian dragon god, Ušumgallu... The beast born as one of the familiars of Tiamat, the mother goddess of the ocean and the earth..."

"Yes, Tiamat. She granted fearsome power to this dragon and added it to the ranks of the gods..."

"The name Ušumgallu carries the meaning, 'the one and only, absolute king'..."

Via mouth to mouth, Erica and Ena offered knowledge and love to Godou.

After a while, they were no longer alternating but mostly kissing at the same time.

"In the ancient Indian sacred text of the Rigveda, Rudra makes his appearance... It is from this deity that Uldin usurped the authority of the [Bow]..."

"Rudra is considered the same deity as Hinduism's god of destruction, Shiva..."

"Although Shiva and Rudra are both gods of storms... Gods capable of summoning wind, rain and lighting... It is quite important to note that there exists a certain trait that Rudra possesses but Shiva does not..."

Godou pressed himself tightly against Erica while embracing Ena at the same time. Entangled with their burning-hot bodies, he engaged repeatedly in unending kisses.

Occasionally, his lips would overlap with Erica and Ena's simultaneously.

When Erica's lips were caught in Godou's suction, Ena would also slip her own tongue inside, causing all three people's saliva to mix together constantly.

Erica and Ena's tongues would also stir around inside Godou's mouth from time to time.

Every time this this happened, Godou felt an arousing sense of excitement that seemed as though it would numb his nerves.

—In the boat flowing downstream along the Rhine, the trio engaged in intimate contact. While the boat traveled over the flowing river currents, the blade for slicing Devil King Uldin apart was gradually forged.

Chapter 7 - Battle in the Ancient Past

Part 1

The dragons were swimming swiftly on the surface of the Rhine , illuminated bright red by the evening glow.

They were the three dragons that Uldin had brought with him. As for Uldin himself, he was sitting quietly beneath a large tree by the river side.

He was also gnawing on dried meat and drinking water from a leather pouch.

However, rather than Uldin needing a break, it would be more accurate to say that the dragons were resting. After all, these divine beasts and so-called "dragons" were apparently spirits of the water and the land. True to this nature of theirs, they desired water greatly on occasion.

Furthermore, they would become more energetic after absorbing life force and magical power from the water.

Furthermore, Uldin was the godslayer possessing the [Dragon Taming] authority, thus allowing him to keep herds of dragons and make them do his bidding. Currently, he had nine dragons prepared at his stronghold.

And out of those nine, only three of them were right here.

But that was just as well.

The more dragons he commanded at the same time, the more magical power they consumed. That would then prevent him from using other authorities.

In battles against gods and godslayers, enemy tactics cannot be predicted. Hence, in order to have various authorities available at his disposal for flexible usage, having three or four dragons was the optimum number.

"It's almost about time..."

The bright red and setting sun was sinking below the western horizon. Night would fall soon after. The dragons were also reenergized.

It was finally time to take the Holy Maiden—the godslayer beauty who stood as his peer—for himself.

Despite her graceful and beautiful appearance, looking as vulnerable as though she might break from the wind, she was quite a magnificent "bronco." This was precisely the type of woman Uldin preferred. If she relented, he would definitely marry her as his fifth wife.

(As a side note, Ruska was the first wife while Clotilde was the fourth. The second and third wives were currently stationed in Uldin's "secondary residences" in Germania and Sarmatia respectively.)

Uldin stood up and yelled to the dragons that were frolicking in the water.

"Time to get going. Next comes marriage time!"

Godou and his two companions were traveling west on the Rhine in their boat.

This happened to be towards the setting sun. Finally arriving at the town of Augusta Raurica, the scenery of the stronghold could be seen in the distance not too far away.

The journey down the river finally ended peacefully.

However, Godou, Erica and Ena were all silent, maintaining their gazes straight ahead.

The trio were sitting side by side yet no one spoke. The atmosphere was quite awkward. Due to the vivid memories of what the trio was doing earlier, none of them could speak.

But finally, Erica spoke up in a murmur.

"Although I have already experienced cases in the past when you acted in an unstoppable manner like this, Godou, you are truly extraordinary in these situations."

"Uh yeah. Indeed you're right..."

Godou nodded powerlessly.

Whether using Verethragna's sixth incarnation, the [Youth], or under the influence of Lancelot's [Insane Rush], there had been several similar incidents in the past.

"But this time, Godou, you did it entirely by your own volition. Still, I responded as I've always done in the past... Unknowingly, I've grown accustomed to this sort of thing..."

"Yes yes. Ena has also unknowingly accepted it, or rather, participated..."

Erica spoke as if completely exhausted while Ena commented with a hesitant expression.

"How should we tell Yuri and Liliana-san about what happened ..."

"Of course we keep it a secret. If they were to find out the embarrassing way we acted... I don't even want to imagine the look on Lily's face at all. Likewise with Yuri... Indeed, we cannot tell them."

"Yeah. However, umm... Doing *that* together, it's quite happy, right?"

Ena murmured softly to herself. Her face completely shy, she lowered her gaze.

Anger immediately erupted on Erica's face. Sternly, she glared at the Hime-Miko.

"Ena-san, making absolutely unladylike statements like this is your shortcoming!"

"S-Sorry, Erica-san. You really hate this huh..."

Erica did not answer, but instead, she pinched Godou's back. Furthermore, she pinched especially hard. As Godou cried out " Ouch!" from the unexpected pain, the Diavolo Rosso declared angrily:

"Why don't you just endure this willingly? This is your comeuppance for sweeping us into something weird. Then hurry and apologize to me. Kiss me gently on the cheek as an apology for what you did just now."

"An apology is fine, but kissing is a bit..."

"Seriously! You already went that far just now, yet you're completely useless during times like this!"

Angrily, Erica pinched Godou's back even harder.

But as Godou leaned back due to the pain, the blonde beauty gently leaned herself against him. Stretching forward a little, she brought her lips close to Godou's ear and whispered softly.

"I-In order not to upset my composure too much in those circumstances, at least give me a warning beforehand. Th-That was really dangerous just now, but at least I managed to salvage the situation in front of Ena-san..."

Then she even bit Godou lightly on his earlobe.

Suddenly suffering her counterattack, Godou felt his heart begin to pound hard. Through the pain just now, he understood what Erica was feeling. Compared to anger, she was feeling far more embarrassed.

The girl with the devil moniker bowed her head, her face blushing bright red.

Seeing her acting so adorably, Godou was overcome with the desire to hug her when he found himself embraced by someone else. Ena had pounced on him, her face in a pout.

"Your Majesty! E-Even Ena should be able to.. d-do it properly next time. Don't just look at Erica. I don't want that!"

Although her words sounded like a child's, Ena also pressed her body tightly against Godou.

This was an act that seemed to be desperately asserting her existence, probably undertaken without conscious intent. However , the one doing it was Ena with her amazing body instead of a mere child.

Naturally, her bountiful bosom was pressed tightly against Godou and he could smell the fragrance from her hair from a close distance.

Seeing Godou fall silent, Erica went "What am I going to do with you, Ena-san?" as a noblewoman's gentle smile appeared on her face.

Noticing Erica's reaction, Ena smiled wryly and relaxed the strength in her embrace. Suddenly, the trio was startled.

The mood had turned unusual again...

"W-We've almost reached the stronghold, let's get ready to disembark!"

"A-Ah yeah. Uldin doesn't seem to be here yet."

"He said he was returning when night falls. H-He should be keeping his promise, right!?"

Frantically, the trio separated from one another, feigning calmness as they changed the topic.

The setting sun dyed the world a vivid shade of red. It evoked sanguine imagery of the upcoming bloodshed. A rather inauspicious scene. Furthermore, Godou suddenly felt a sense of chill.

Daytime during spring was supposed to be quite warm.

Was it getting cold because night fell? Godou felt a chill that felt like it was from a night in autumn.

Mooring the boat behind the stronghold and disembarking, the trio instantly rushed to the backdoor.

The guards led them inside as soon as they recognized Godou and his companions. Uldin should be attacking soon, so it was imperative to confer with Madame Aisha as quickly as possible—

Spurred by these anxious feelings, Godou's group entered the stronghold. To be honest, they originally expected the soldiers' morale to have reached rock bottom. For example, due to the imminent attack of Devil King Uldin, the soldiers should be hyperventilating from fear or the like. Perhaps there would even be plenty of deserters.

However, they felt a sense of dissonance after getting off the boat.

Noisy sounds and strange yells were coming from the stronghold incessantly.

"What high spirits..."

"She must have used the charisma authority."

Ena and Erica both showed surprise on their faces. This was only logical. In various places inside the stronghold, the soldiers were yelling loudly.

'We must protect the Holy Maiden!' 'WOOOOOOOOOH!' 'You guys, that's not loud enough!' 'WOOOOOOOOOH!' 'Uldin is not scary at all! There is nothing to fear but our fear itself towards that guy!' 'WOOOOOOOOOH!' 'Our Holy Maiden! Our Holy Maiden!' 'WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOH!'

Angry roars, screams, shouts and yells intersected.

Roughly six hundred soldiers were yelling their hardest with all the passion they could muster.

Bathed completely in their zealous gazes was Madame Aisha. Standing by the lectern where the commander usually gave speeches from, she was waving her hand with a look of embarrassment.

"This reminds me of the time when my friend Miura invited me to a concert. A female idol..."

Godou muttered. On one hand, here was an army of males, willing to lay down their lives in battle. On the other hand, those were boys and middle-aged men willing to offer their youthfulness and lives to their idol's concert.

Clearly, their natures were diametrically opposed yet for some reason, they had similarities no matter how you looked at it.

As a side note, the commander and officers were mixed in among the soldiers, yelling with all their might. They were already submerged within the crowd. All the people had bloodshot eyes and were in a state of frenzy.

Leading Erica and Ena, Godou approached Madame Aisha's lectern.

"Aisha-san! What happened!?"

"S-Sorry, it looks like I used the charisma authority too much! B-Because everyone in the army were afraid of Uldin-san and the flying dragons, so I had to use it often on them—"

"Even in controlled amounts, accumulation over time would still create a group of fanatics huh..."

"I guess an overly convenient power always has its drawbacks... "

Godou and the Madame had to converse as loudly as the soldiers' enraged yelling.

At the same time, Erica and Ena seemed to be nodding to each other with heartfelt revelations.

"Because everyone has gathered together for the sake of my protection... I can't escape discreetly. Even if I said I would leave this place, they said absolutely no and kept me here..."

Descending from the lectern, Madame Aisha explained with a look of depression.

"By the way... Kusanagi-san, how did you survive? I thought Uldin-san would have killed you for sure."

"Please don't write me off as dead so casually. At least I managed to escape."

"S-Sorry. Because if you were already dead, Kusanagi-san, I would have no choice but to inherit your will and muster my resolve..."

Her face full of shyness, the Madame raised her fist to demonstrate her "resolve."

"In fact, I am currently reversing my healing authority for the sake of battle."

"Reversing... What does that mean?"

"My healing ability comes from Persephone, the goddess of spring who brings the cycle of life. In fact, she not only controls spring but is also the queen of the underworld who rules over death and winter. Using roughly one day's worth of time as preparation, my authority can be reversed to freeze all existence via [Winter's Might]."

"Unbelievable—!"

"But if I accidentally overuse it, the cold of winter lingers temporarily. So please take care."

"Exactly how long is 'temporarily'?"

"Half a year to a year maybe... Depending on conditions, it could last even longer. Even sunlight becomes very poor."

"I have a feeling that you will surely end up doing it ' accidentally,' Aisha-san, so please stop the reversal."

Even in the modern age, cool summers and harsh winters could cause massive effects on the volume of harvests, let alone in the ancient world. This could very well develop into widespread famine.

Realizing deeply that this affected many people, Godou was struck strongly by such a thought:

Why does this person possess nothing but all these troublemaking authorities...?

"Let me go fight Uldin. That's the reason I came back."

"In other words, you're going to fight for my protection!?"

"Formally, I guess you could say that..."

Avoiding Madame Aisha's grateful gaze of thanks, Godou turned to look at the Hime-Miko.

At some point in time, she had started gazing intently at the distant sky. The sun had already set and the sky had just darkened .

"They're here. Three dragons as expected. Uldin-san is also riding one of them."

"Got it. So, I'll be back in a bit, okay?"

Ena laughed at last while Erica responded with a lioness' smile.

Indeed, they were such reliable companions. Godou nodded hard towards them and ran up the castle walls. Although the outward side of the walls was vertical, the inner side was sloped gently with steps.

Climbing to the top of the castle walls, Godou waited for the dragons' arrival.

As expected a few minutes later, he heard Uldin's voice again after half a day, coming from the sky above.

"Yo comrade! I didn't expect to find you here!"

Thus the curtain finally rose for the duel between the modern and the ancient godslayers.

Part 2

"Because it's a long story, I'll just be brief. I came here by Ruska-san and Clotilde-san's request. My purpose: to beat you up. "

"What, it's those two!?"

Godou was standing on the pathway atop the city walls, roughly five meters from ground level.

From his vantage point, the streets of Augusta Raurica as well as neighboring forests and roads could all be seen clearly. Overhead was the starry sky of ancient Europe, as well as three pterosaurs—

Uldin ordered his dragon mount to descend and deliberately came to the air above Godou's location.

"For things to leak out so quickly, it must be Ruska's doing huh. "

Apparently realizing the situation, the Hunnic godslayer muttered with deep feeling to himself.

Similar incidents must surely have happened dozens of times already. However, Uldin immediately recovered his cheer and smiled with delight.

"Oh well, I'll just have to please them a bit later. So, are you going to say you'll kill me too, comrade? I really hope that you'll not interfere in consideration of our solidarity as fellow godslayers ."

"If it were possible, I don't want to do this either. But that's out of the question."

Godou asserted openly.

"If you continue to do as you please, the people in the town will suffer. And Aisha-san might even say she will bring herself to fight . So let me stop you here."

"Aisha... Is that the name of the Holy Maiden? This is my first encounter with a female godslayer."

Uldin was quite happy. He had also entered a state of battle readiness.

Filled with fighting spirit, Uldin was gazing down at Godou below him with cautious eyes.

"It'd be a bit presumptuous if I said I'm fine with two against one, but I don't mind bearing a little hardship for a woman's sake, yeah?"

"She has her own situation to deal with. So I asked her to take a break."

Madame Aisha was currently stuck in an organization that was devoted to sacrificing their lives for her.

Godou did not want to see them throw their lives at Uldin and perish. In order to prevent the beautiful Campione from entering the fray, Godou would face Uldin one on one.

"Bold words, comrade! In that case, let us decide the victor!"

Uldin made his dragon mount ascend rapidly and converged with its two companions in the air.

With the Hunnic dragon rider leading the charge, the two other pterosaurs followed on his left and right as his wingmen, resulting in a triangular "" formation. It was almost like a team of fighter jets.

Uldin's first attack was an arrow.

"O Rudra's thunder! The hammer that descends from the heavens!"

From the saddle of his dragon mount, Uldin picked up arrows and a small-sized bow, firing them with extreme speed and divine skill. The arrow sliced through the air as it flew straight at Godou's forehead.

Standing on the pathway above the castle walls, Godou instantly jumped sideways and barely managed to dodge the attack.

Falling into the interior of the stronghold, the arrow turned into lightning and struck one of the living quarters of the soldiers.

CRAAAAAAAAAAAASH!

A thunderous rumbling accompanied the descending lightning.

The lightning from Uldin's arrow exploded with electrical light and shock the instant it struck the soldiers' quarters, easily demolishing the single-storied building.

"O fire of Rudra, incinerate this land to ashes!"

Next, Uldin shot an arrow towards the sky.

Despite the small size of the bows normally used by nomadic tribes, they had considerable range. Not only limited to wood, even animal shin bones and other materials would be used for arrows. The bowstrings also had immense tension.

Impelled by the bow, the arrow flew high into the sky, turning into several hundred fireballs.

These fireballs kept raining down upon the land, a sight akin to a night sky lit up by fireworks. Were all these fireballs to land on target, the stronghold would undoubtedly turn into a sea of fire.

In order to oppose the vicious flames, Godou drew out his weapon.

Verethragna's final incarnation, the [Warrior], was the swordsman wielding the golden sword.

"Rudra was a god of ancient India... Furthermore, he is the bow-wielding god of storms."

The spell words of the sword for severing divinities and divine powers—

With Godou's chanting of spell words, the golden spheres of light danced haphazardly in the air.

Like radiant starlight from a galaxy, the lights covered the vast stronghold like a canopy, destroying all the hundreds of fireballs that landed on them.

"Rudra can be said to be one of the many forms of Shiva, the god of destruction. The name Shiva carries the meaning of the ' Quiet One.' In contrast, Rudra can be translated as the 'Roarer.' Consequently, one can conclude that these two gods are complementary sides of a single existence!"

"Lights that destroyed Rudra's arrows—They're spell words!?"

Overlooking the [Sword]'s canopy and Godou who had uttered spell words from the castle walls, Uldin expressed surprise from his position in the air. However, he did not stop attacking.

Nocking arrows to the bow, he fired three arrows. This time, these were arrows of raging wind and rain.

Massive raindrops were mixed with the tempestuous wind, striking the canopy violently as they followed the arrows. Then they were destroyed.

"Oh... Rather than blocking my arrows, it is eliminating them instead huh."

Uldin muttered, fully impressed. Then he smiled with delight.

"Mere mutterings are enough to produce incantations for countering Rudra huh. If that's the case, let's see if you can counter other authorities... Here's a test. Flying dragons, attack!"

KUUUAAAAAAAAH! KUUUAAAAAAAAH!

The two pterosaurs dove rapidly towards Godou who was standing alone on the pathway over the castle walls. At the same time, they swung the "terrible claws" equipped on their hind legs.

Uldin's pterosaurs measured roughly seven meters in body length.

Despite their large bodies, they would only be considered small sized among divine beasts. This body size allowed for exceptional speed and agility. The two pterosaurs approached swiftly, almost like arrows. Obviously, the [Sword] could not defend against them .

Naturally, the ones who stepped up to the task at this moment were Erica and Ena. Swiftly, they ran up to the castle walls and brandished their weapons.

"And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them! Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city—!"[16]

While chanting the smiting spell words, Erica used her oval shield to block the claws of one of the pterosaurs.

Then returning Cuore di Leone to its original form, she made a thrust with the longsword and did not forget to make another stab at the pterosaur's hind leg for good measure. Although it was not enough to cause the enemy a severe injury, it counted as a counterattacking blow anyway.

Clad in her rossonero cape of red and black, Erica was enveloped in the sacred privilege of extermination.

"O Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. Grant me your power to vanquish the barbarians!"

On the other hand, Ena was the one who blocked the second flying pterosaur.

Holding the jet-black divine sword, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, she used divine possession to fill herself with the divine sword's aura and ran in front of Godou.

Just as she was about to make an overhead strike using the *hassou-no-kamae* stance[17]—the second pterosaur avoided Ena.

Making a turn in the trajectory of its rapid descent, the pterosaur evaded Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's blade.

The second pterosaur thus returned to the sky beside Uldin. The first one also returned to its master's side without striking back at Erica.

"Unlike usual, they're not attacking mindlessly. This is difficult."

"These pterosaurs are probably controlled by Uldin's will directly. Think of them as his avatars or remote controlled weapons."

The two girls stood in formation on Godou's left and right respectively as they whispered to each other.

Uldin's authority for controlling the pterosaurs was usurped from Ušumgallu the dragon god. An ancient Sumerian sacred beast, it was a divinity whose folklore was no longer circulated in the modern age. That was what Godou had learnt from Erica and Ena.

However, he was not going to turn this knowledge into the [Sword].

Given one of Uldin's authorities had to be sealed, Godou decided that [Rudra's Arrows] was still the choice to take.

"How are the people in the army?"

"The Madame has given them orders, telling them to 'protect themselves and retreat from the castle.' In any case, it means they are evacuating along with their loved ones."

Hearing Erica's report, Godou glanced behind him.

The six-hundred-man army was moving in an organized manner. Various squads were passing through the castle gates and exiting the stronghold in sequence.

"Since Aisha-san can heal injuries, we're leaving that side to her. Your Majesty, you should focus on the battle against Uldin-san!"

Godou nodded at Ena's advice and turned his attention to the air once more.

The three pterosaurs reformed their triangular formation and glided casually through the air. Furthermore, the night sky had filled with dark clouds without prior warning. These clouds must have been summoned by Uldin's authority.

As the god of the bow, Rudra possessed divine aspects as the storm god who summoned wind and rain—

But to Godou, another aspect was the hardest to handle.

Finally, that was precisely the aspect Uldin was using. Amidst the dark clouds that were spreading across the sky, the sun's dazzling radiance could undoubtedly be seen. However, this was obviously not the true sun.

Rather than the true sun, this was a mini pseudo-sun.

Nevertheless, its temperature and flames were extraordinary.

"I don't have a taste for sluggish containment tactics."

Uldin's voice descended from the pseudo-sun that illuminated the night sky.

"Since they're not working anyway, I'll simply shoot all my arrows at once to my heart's content. In addition—this attack style seems to trouble you, comrade?"

"Adapting flexibly to the situation to make the next move instantly..."

"He's quite similar to His Majesty in this regard..."

As Erica and Ena watched in surprise, Godou was also rendered speechless.

Clearly, Uldin was flying far above, high in the sky, yet he seemed to be able to discern Godou's expression and situation as though he were engaged in close range combat. Perhaps this was part of the resourcefulness he possessed as a "leader."

Pulling back a certain distance, discerning the thoughts of the enemy leader, attacking when the enemy showed an opening, thereby defeating the enemy.

Someone capable of performing that was truly worthy of first-class renown as an illustrious commander or strategist.

"Pray, people. Such that you may escape Rudra's arrows."

Then two arrows appeared in Uldin's right hand. Both had arrowheads made of gold. This was the golden arrow that had engaged Godou's [White Stallion] in mutual annihilation several days earlier.

At the time, Uldin had used one arrow. This time, he was using double.

"The difference in firepower is really too great huh..."

After all, the [White Stallion] was only one out of the ten incarnations. It probably could not oppose Rudra's arrows with the full firepower of an entire authority poured into them.

Since this was foreseen beforehand, Godou was not scared. Instead, he focused his concentration. The mutual attack coming up was critical. No matter what, he must smash his way through—!

"Rudra's name carries the meaning of the "Roarer." However, that's not all there is to it. There are additional meanings of the ' Ruddy One' or the 'Shining One.' Furthermore, Rudra appears in

the myths as a man with red skin, his body adorned with shining gold!"

"I pray to the god from yonder distant lands who shoots to kill, please grant your mercy. By this arrow, all life shall be extinguished!"

Chanting spell words at the same time, both sides poured magical power into their respective weapons.

"The sacred scripture of the Rigveda describes Rudra in thus manner: 'Radiant as the sun, lustrous as gold.' Hence, he also carries the traits of a sun god as one whose authority rules over fire and light!"

"Fathers, mothers, old people and babies. All shall kneel at the feet of the god of slaughter!"

"Opposing the flames of Verethragna's incarnation—the [White Stallion], that was indeed the attack shot by Rudra the sun god."

Unleashed all at once!

Uldin first nocked the two golden arrows on his bow and shot them out at the same time.

Rather than Godou, they were aimed at the pseudo-sun that offered vague glimpses behind the clouds.

The pseudo-sun absorbed the golden arrows and instantly increased in brightness. Furthermore, this triggered its descent.

The pseudo-sun moved towards the ground—the stronghold where Godou and his companions were located.

This was a sphere whose diameter was roughly forty or fifty meters wide. Were it to crash violently into the ground, the flames would immediately spread far and wide, incinerating the entire surroundings to nothing in an instant.

Blocking this attack in midair was the group of [Swords] controlled by Godou.

Countless small [Swords] were gathered together. Shining radiantly like a galaxy, the brightness spread out far and wide, forming a net of light to block the pseudo-sun's descent.

As Rudra's divine power was sliced apart, the pseudo-sun's light and flames instantly weakened.

However, the pseudo-sun was infused with the full firepower of [Rudra's Arrows]. There was not enough time to annihilate all of the flames.

The net of light gradually became unable to support the falling pseudo-sun.

The pseudo-sun kept descending towards the stronghold—It was right overhead of Godou, Erica and Ena.

Its distance from the ground was 100m, 90m, 80m, 70m...

"Godou—!" "Your Majesty!?"

"That guy... Uldin will surely interfere... I'm leaving that to you girls!"

Despite Erica and Ena's calls, Godou could only give such a response.

He needed to focus all of his magical power and concentration on controlling his authority.

But as expected of the two girls, they understood Godou's intent from a single order and diverted their attention from the pseudo-sun towards their surroundings.

In the current predicament, golden light was pouring down accompanied by a large amount of flames that were about to fall upon them.

If Godou were to fail, even the girls would be involved in the consequences. Himself aside, if Erica and Ena were to be burnt to charcoal—This was a scene Godou absolutely did not want to witness.

"For victory, hasten forth before me... O immortal sun, I beseech thee to grant radiance to the stallion!"

Godou chanted spell words, in order to use two of Verethragna's incarnations simultaneously.

He was struck with a splitting headache for this was the price paid for excessive power.

"O stallion that moveth godlike with wondrous grace, bring forth the halo of thy master!"

While sustaining the [Sword]'s spell words, Godou summoned the [White Stallion] from the eastern sky.

The rays of dawn added a rosy layer of color to the night sky that was illuminated golden by the pseudo-sun. The sight was quite similar to the aurora borealis visible near arctic regions.

Since the [Sword] alone was unable to dispel the pseudo-sun's flames, Godou decided to borrow the [White Stallion]'s power as well—

As the trump cards of Kusanagi Godou and Uldin clashed together, the end result was the annihilation of all light.

Whether flames, the sun, the spell words' light or dawn's radiance, all disappeared.

The surroundings were shrouded in the darkness and silence of night again.

Until just now, there had been an exceptionally intense source of light overhead.

The sudden darkness made it difficult to adjust instantly. This was quite a rare experience for a Campione who possessed keen night vision like wild beasts. Plunged into darkness, Godou shuddered.

If an attack came right now—That would be terrible. Just as Godou was about to warn his companions...

"Shrouded by clouds, the little island's deity cowered... Closure of eyes, closure of the heart—Ama no Murakumo, please. Become Ena's eyes!"

The Hime-Miko of the Sword chanted spell words and prayed to her partner of steel.

In the next instant, Godou felt magical power erupting from Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

Although the jet-black divine blade was a [Sword], it also possessed its own will and senses as a divinity. Being a sword, it did not possess normal vision but instead perceived its surroundings through divine supernatural senses.

In other words, night or day was irrelevant—

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was now expanding its sensing network to search for approaching enemies.

"Yaaaaaaaah!"

Ena suddenly swung the divine sword and sliced through the darkness.

Clang! The sound of two hard objects colliding was heard. Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi had intercepted the "terrible claw" flying in the darkness.

Imperceptibly, a pterosaur had silently approached.

"Uwaaaah!"

The claw and the divine sword were almost equally matched in power and hardness. Ena was sent flying along with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi and rolled down the inner slope of the castle walls. Stumbling, the pterosaur flew back high into the sky.

Just as Godou's eyes finally adjusted to the darkness and watched the scene just now—

"Godou, duck down!"

Erica warned him. He looked up into the sky.

The second pterosaur was making a rapid descent. Furthermore , its size was massive.

Earlier, its body length was still roughly seven meters, but now it had doubled in size. Uldin must have infused his magical power to strengthen it!

"Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho!"[18]

Enveloping herself in red light, Erica also flew up.

Sacred exterminators were capable of flight for short durations.

She collided directly with the enlarged pterosaur in the air. The pterosaur spread out its "terrible claws" and tried to catch Erica. This was a hunting method similar to that used by birds of prey.

Using the red light's protection, Erica defended against the attack. At the same time, she stabbed the lion's magic sword into the enemy's black skin.

"He shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it!"[19]

Seizing this opportunity, Erica infused the magic sword with the sacred privilege of extermination.

Then someone's whistling was heard at this moment. Instantly, the enlarged pterosaur effortlessly tossed Erica aside and flew high up into the air.

The two pterosaurs were implementing hit-and-run tactics.

Hence, Erica and Ena's attacks were hindered and unable to deal heavy blows to the divine beasts. In addition, the third pterosaur, carrying Uldin, finally arrived.

Spurring the pterosaur in a rapid descent towards the ground, he simultaneously shot arrows at Godou who was on the castle walls.

With astounding skills of consecutive shots, he fired seven arrows and immediately ordered his dragon mount to ascend swiftly.

Godou instantly jumped to the side, diving into a roll and barely evading the attacks. Nevertheless, he could not escape completely unscathed. An arrow struck his left shoulder.

"Hahahaha! I was thinking of shooting you dead under the cover of darkness, but it looks like it won't be that easy!"

Leaving behind his laughter, Uldin returned to the air.

Immediately after the magnificent strike with the pseudo-sun, Uldin switched flexibly to a surprise assault and using the pterosaurs for hit-and-run tactics. This was quite a large change in the fight.

"Indeed, so long as those flying divine beasts remain, their threat will only increase..."

"A flying divine beast also gave us a tough time during New Year's Eve and January..."

Erica and Ena returned to Godou's side.

Cursing those flying dragons with great hatred in his mind, Godou pulled out the arrow from his shoulder. Since it was embedded in his flesh, it hurt quite a lot of course. It also bled. However, the wound was not very serious.

The iron arrowhead was incapable of penetrating a Campione's shoulder blade that was harder than steel.

"In that case, we can still continue to fight..."

Speaking of ways to handle flying enemies, Godou had already learnt the method.

That had occurred during his battles at Cape Inubou as well as the South Seas practically at the equator—

Part 3

"The one unblunted and unapproachable! Oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

In response to Godou's spell words, the [Boar] manifested from within the stronghold.

The twenty-meter-long black divine beast. Its brawny and massive body trampled and crushed a row of soldiers' quarters, demolishing buildings as it advanced.

It made its way towards the castle walls, behind where Godou's group was standing—

Godou had set the three pterosaurs as the targets for destruction . Currently, the pterosaurs remained circling high in the air above, preparing to make the next strike.

"Listen carefully... I'll let you rampage as much as you want later."

The [Boar] curled itself up behind Godou, its ferocious fighting spirit about to explode.

Godou suppressed the [Boar] as he softly scolded it.

"You're not allowed to move yet... For now, you will act as a substitute castle and stronghold!"

ROOOOOOOOAAAAAAAR!

The [Boar] cried out with what appeared to be displeasure. However, it was not trying to resist. Although it was not the black divine beast's original intention, it still planned to respond to its master's orders.

The instant Godou nodded, one of the pterosaurs made a rapid descent.

This was the giant pterosaur that had doubled in size, the one that Erica had blocked just now. Uldin was not riding it.

"Do it!"

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAR!

As Godou shouted, the [Boar] roared again. As usual, its howls were mixed with shockwaves. The rapidly descending pterosaur was blown back.

Although the giant pterosaur lost balance as a result, it barely managed to recover.

Temporarily stopping its attack towards the ground, it returned to Uldin's side.

"Ohoh, comrade, so you tame wild beasts too? What a coincidence! Let's go!"

Riding on a dragon's back, Uldin gazed upon the [Boar] with admiration and gave orders.

The second pterosaur immediately descended. However, it too was easily blown away. Naturally, this was also the result of the [Boar]'s roars from the ground.

ROOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

Like the hand of an invisible giant, the shockwaves blew the second pterosaur away.

Let alone attack, it could not even approach the castle walls. With that, the second pterosaur crashed towards the ground. Probably because of its smaller body size compared to the first pterosaur, it could not withstand the hit.

—Rather than allowing the [Boar] to charge, Godou had chosen to use its shockwaves as the stronghold's artillery.

This was the tactic the [Boar] had used not too long ago in the battles against Circe the goddess of dawn. Godou was now imitating the same method.

"What strange skills this thing possesses. In that case, how about this!?"

Uldin called out and threw down two leather bags from his saddle.

Their contents were poured out and scattered throughout the air.

It was a great quantity of white teeth. Probably numbering a hundred roughly.

Godou remembered. Back during his first encounter with Uldin outside Augusta Raurica, that guy had turned these teeth into magical beasts—!

"Ruska mentioned it! Uldin's [Dragon Taming] authority allows him to turn the teeth and claws fallen from dragons into his minions!"

"So it really was that guy's authority!"

Informed by Erica, Godou clicked his tongue.

The many teeth transformed in the air. They turned into small-sized *Deinonychuses* roughly four meters in length. Furthermore, instead of front limbs they had wings sprouting from their shoulders.

In other words, this was an army of almost a hundred mini-pterosaurs!

The mini-pterosaurs kept flying towards Godou's group on the castle walls.

Swarming from all directions, all three hundred and sixty degrees, they approached. The [Boar]'s mission was to intercept them.

ROOOOOOOAAAAAAAR! ROOOOOOOAAAAAAAR! ROOOOOOOAAAAAAAR! ROOOOOOOAAAAAAAR!

The black divine beast kept emitting cries with shockwaves, striking down wave after wave of the mini-pterosaurs as though it were a workflow.

Even so, due to the great numbers, there were naturally those that slipped through.

However, the mini-pterosaurs that escaped the shockwaves still aimed for Godou as their target. Hence, Erica and Ena were able to attack with impunity, piercing them with the magic sword and slaying them with the divine sword. Had there been any remnants of the Roman army lingering in the stronghold, the beasts might

have produced turmoil amongst them. However, the soldiers all seemed to have retreated already.

Very quickly, the army of mini-pterosaurs was essentially all wiped out.

Seeing this, Uldin made his pterosaur descend to roughly twenty meters away from the castle walls where Godou's group was standing.

"How amazing, comrade. Of course, I already had great confidence in your capability... But to be honest, I never expected I'd be pushed to this degree."

As the pterosaur landed, its "wings" disappeared.

The wings on its left and right transformed back into the short front limbs. From what Godou had observed so far, these front limbs had no use apart from the ability to grab things.

With that, the pterosaur basically transformed into a *Deinonychus*.

"I want you as my proxy more and more. Let's make a promise. I will conquer this castle next. If you're still alive by that point—You will surrender and serve under my military command. "

Uldin smiled joyfully from astride the back of the *Deinonychus*.

In a reversal of positions from earlier, Godou was now staring down from the castle walls at the smiling Uldin. Serving the important role as a 'fortress,' the [Boar] was waiting quietly behind him.

The black divine beast's brawny and giant body trembled, moaning "uuuu..." quietly.

Its eyes were bloodshot. The suppressed fighting spirit was apparently reaching a limit.

"But unfortunately, I'm not confident that I can defeat you with your life intact. So perhaps, my offer is akin to a delusional dream. Let me state beforehand, don't hate me if you get killed, okay?"

"As usual, you're still saying whatever you want on your own... "

Godou made a wry expression in response to Uldin's words.

Despite the man's declaration of absolute certainty in victory, Godou still found him quite likable. Despite him being a barbarian in the ancient world, Godou still felt a sense of intellectuality.

This was definitely some sort of charisma. However, precisely because of that—

"You're the one who should agree to my promise. If I win, stop asking me about this!"

"Sure, so the wager's on now."

How could I possibly let you have victory? Godou yelled in such a manner. Uldin responded similarly.

Then the Hunnic godslayer began to chant new spell words.

"O mother, creator of all life and existence."

The battlefield was strewn with piles of the mini-pterosaurs' remains.

Massive bodies moved amidst all this. Those were the two pterosaurs brought by Uldin. Witnessing the two divine beasts flying over their master's head, Godou nodded.

These two pterosaurs had not been defeated. They had only taken a brief break to gather their energy!

"Now I once again grant sharp teeth to these dragons, conferring merciless poison!"

The two pterosaurs' bodies overlapped and merged together.

Two into one. The two pterosaurs combined into a single body to become a "giant dragon" and proceeded to enlarge further.

The outstretched wings were exceptionally wide. The wingspan probably measured forty meters or so.

Judging purely from the head and body, it was roughly the [Boar]'s size.

Apart from the long neck like a plesiosaur's and the tail of a scorpion's, the rest of the body was the same as before.

Growing on the head were seven horns that gave off an aura of solemnity like a crown.

"In order to take out this giant thing, I guess I have to go this far ."

Extraordinary magical power was coursing through Uldin's body.

It was flowing towards the giant dragon with its wings outstretched above him. Receiving the master's power, the giant dragon transformed into an even more ferocious state. Its outer skin changed into dragon scales of bright red.

With the giant red dragon's appearance, the massive black boar cried out loudly.

ROOOOOAAAAAAR!

Due to the shockwaves carried by the roar, not only the air but also the castle and the ground began to shake. Was the [Boar]'s suppression reaching a limit—?

Godou motioned to his companions with his eyes. Erica and Ena nodded lightly in response.

They both understood it was time for victory to be decided.

"The one unblunted and unapproachable, oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

"O dragon! Clad in a crown of fire and fear, turn into a god!"

In the next instant, Godou and Uldin both yelled out spell words.

Then the giant red dragon spread its vast wings and flew above the stronghold, widening its jaws that were lined with rows of vicious teeth and breathing out fierce flames. In response, the giant black boar roared back as usual.

ROOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

In the instant the shockwaves, mixed amidst the roaring, neutralized the giant dragon's flames, the [Boar] leaped.

Like a rocket fired from a launchpad, the [Boar] pounced on the giant red dragon in the air. Burying its tusks into the giant dragon's chest, the ferocious and charging [Boar] then crashed into the ground together with the flying beast.

Entangled together, the two beasts did not separate after falling to the ground.

The situation was as though two human martial artists were grappling with pinning techniques.

The [Boar] was on top with the red dragon pinned underneath. However, the giant dragon reached out with its long neck and bit the [Boar]'s stout head. Blood gushed out from the wound.

Next, the giant dragon's hind legs were still equipped with those "terrible claws" of the *Deinonychus*.

The two hooked claws buried themselves respectively in the left and right sides of the [Boar]'s body, tearing into it. Although the [Boar] was superior in its ability to charge, a fight on the ground seemed to be favoring the giant dragon.

Just as the battle was about to be decided, Erica sprang into action.

"O red emblem formed from a cross... Turn into a wedge and pierce the enemy!"

Enveloped entirely in red light, the sacred exterminator flew at full speed.

Using the shield on her left hand to guard her body, she charged in a straight line towards the giant red dragon's flank.

Striking the enemy with her body along with the lion's magic sword, it was as though a giant's right straight punch had landed on the massive dragon—This was quite similar to the charging attack that Erica's uncle had performed back in the present.

Strong as the red dragon was, its massive head still shook from the blow and released the [Boar]'s head from its jaws.

Were it an ordinary divine beast, this attack would have simply defeated it. Nevertheless, as expected of the "hidden move" that Udin had poured his power into, the giant dragon remained alive.

Erica continued to fly and separated herself from the giant dragon's side.

Due to exhausting the exterminator's power in the attack just now, the light enveloping her had weakened and she was about to land. However, she had already distanced herself a sufficient amount.

"Go! Now is the time for a full-powered attack to defeat the enemy!"

Godou instantly ordered the [Boar] who had time for respite thanks to Erica.

The black beast inhaled deeply to fill its mouth with air.

Then it roared at full blast—

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO
!

These were the shockwaves the giant boar released by pouring its full power into them.

The destructive power caused the giant dragon's body to shake intensely, broken in various places all over by the shockwaves. Using a human body as an analogy, it would be a tragic state like having all the bones crushed and all the internal organs ruptured.

Oh well, the price paid by the [Boar] was quite substantial too.

The shockwaves also caused considerable damage to the [Boar]' s own body.

In the manner of mutual defeat, the two giant beasts desperately endured their pain, but finally succumbed—Both of them disappeared from the ground as a pair.

Immediately afterwards, a giant shadow appeared right before the eyes of Godou's group.

It was the *Deinonychus*, the divine beast carrying Uldin as its rider.

Despite having lost its wings, it was still able to jump onto the castle walls with great agility.

Using those "terrible claws" to nimbly cling to the edge of the walls, the divine beast maintained its balance.

"Your Majesty, danger!"

Rushing in front of Godou, Ena slashed the divine sword's blade towards the divine beast's throat.

In response, the *Deinonychus* opened its mouth to reveal the dense rows of sharp teeth growing inside. This supernatural creature merely resembled a dinosaur but was no reptile. Godou expected it to spew out flames or lightning—But he guessed wrongly.

The *Deinonychus* puffed out gray smoke.

This was merely smoke that obscured one's view. However, it caught Godou and Ena completely by surprise.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, the *Deinonychus* swung its flexible tail with a "whoosh" like a whip.

"Waaaaah!"

Struck by the attack, Ena was blown far and away.

She was sent flying outside the castle walls like a golf ball that had been struck by the stroke of a club. Then the *Deinynochus* nimbly leapt down to pursue the Hime-Miko for a follow-up attack.

Naturally, Godou followed, intending to rescue Ena—

Whoosh! At the sound of slicing wind, Godou evaded the attack on instinct.

He jumped towards the outside of the walls, landing on the ground from the five-meter height of the castle walls. Guarding his head with his arms, he buffered the impact and rolled on the ground.

Thanks to a Campione's sturdy body, all he suffered were minor scratches.

Despite the stinging pain all over his body and the unsightly maneuver, Godou had no time to care about that. This was because three arrows had passed through the spot Godou had just occupied.

On ground level once more, Godou endured the pain and stood up instantly.

He looked up at the castle walls where the other godslayer was standing.

"Well dodged, comrade. I've long wanted to enjoy the fun of this kind of one-on-one duel. Man, I am so late to the party."

Readying his bow, Uldin nocked an arrow and aimed at Godou on the ground.

Involuntarily, Godou had jumped down to the ground in the scene that had just transpired. Now, the two Campiones' positions were once again reversed from earlier.

Part 4

The stronghold's surroundings were littered with the corpses of the mini-pterosaurs.

Remains were rolling everywhere. Since almost a hundred pterosaurs were wiped out by the [Boar]'s shockwave attacks, this was only to be expected.

Erica struggled with her exhausted body and made her way towards the stronghold unsteadily.

The sacred privilege of extermination was fully depleted. Erica felt exhausted all over and her head was aching.

Indeed, it was difficult to replicate her uncle's sustainability when using a Paladino-level mystic ritual beyond what her body could withstand.

However, the boy she loved absolutely was currently still engaged in the fight against Uldin.

Very likely, the battle was fast approaching the end phase. She had to hurry over and help him—!

Erica mustered all her strength to rush towards the stronghold. Just as she was doing so, she saw one of her companions fall through the air, tracing out a parabolic trajectory.

It was Seishuuin Ena, wielding Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

However, the Hime-Miko of the Sword was truly amazing. Just as she was about to strike the ground, she swiftly turned herself.

Splendidly landing on her feet, her motions were akin to a cat's.

However, she seemed to have suffered heavy injuries already. After landing, she had difficulty standing properly. Crouching down, she held the side of her abdomen with her free left hand while she wielded Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi in her right.

"Ena-san, are you injured!?"

"I-It's fine. Just minor wounds. Ena will take care of that beast immediately!"

Ena twisted her face as though in pain, answering Erica as she remained in her crouching posture.

She did not look fine at all. However, she was right about there being a beast—This time, a *Deinonychus* descended from the air. It had apparently jumped down in pursuit of Ena.

Landing on the ground, the *Deinonychus* swiftly discovered the weakened Ena.

Stretching out its head, back and tail in a straight line, it ran and approached, opening its grotesque jaws in an attempt to bite the Hime-Miko!

"Grampsy, if you can hear me—Lend your power to Ena!"

Just as she was about to be torn apart by the *Deinonychus*' teeth, Ena cried out.

Immediately, the divine power of Susanoo erupted from her body. Using the power of the storm god who ruled over the wind and the atmosphere, she created a small tornado to suppress the *Deinonychus*' movements.

She had probably remained crouching in order to bait the enemy to attack.

"Yaaaaaah!"

Taking this opportunity to stand up, she launched Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi as one would throw a lance.

Responding well to this manner of usage which was impossible for ordinary swords, the divine sword's sharp blade pierced the *Deinonychus*' throat.

Dealt a fatal blow by the attack, the divine beast's giant body fell over sideways.

Erica was dumbfounded. The *Deinonychus* had been fighting like a beast just now. This was completely different from the hit-and-run tactics it used in Uldin's presence.

"S-Since Uldin-san is currently busy fighting His Majesty, E-Ena thought it probably might work."

Panting heavily, Ena picked up Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

She was still showing a face full of suffering as she pressed her hand against the side of her abdomen. Even so, Ena still cast her gaze towards the stronghold in worry.

The two warriors were facing off, one above and one below the castle walls—Uldin and Kusanagi Godou.

"In any case, I'll cast healing magic on you first."

"Th-Thanks. Erica-san, you're really thoughtful..."

This type of healing magic was not immediately effective. It took a certain length of time before the effects would appear.

Even so, Erica still applied the spell. Ena gave Erica a gaze of gratitude and the two girls nodded at each other.

They had to return to Godou's side as quickly as possible—Without even discussing, the pair had already reached the same decision.

Erica lent her shoulder for Ena to lean on as she walked while gritting her teeth.

At this moment, an unbelievable phenomenon happened.

However, this was also foreseen beforehand, because they had already heard about this type of power.

"This really is..."

"In other words, Uldin finally used his trump card..."

Seeing the various corpses stand up, Ena and Erica whispered softly to each other.

Turning back time slightly—

Erica and Ena were not present. The [Boar] had already disappeared.

Godou was finally all alone. Conversely, Uldin was also alone. The Hunnic godslayer readied his small bow and took down from his belt the quiver of arrows he had taken from the dragon saddle.

Uldin was standing atop the castle walls while Godou was below. Due to this positioning, close-quarter combat was not possible.

"Like I said, the battle isn't decided yet..."

Godou muttered. He still had another incarnation available. Namely, the [Goat].

This sacred beast, capable of using lightning, was unlocked whenever the populace suffered from atrocities and became his allies. Uldin was Augusta Raurica's enemy and there were twenty thousand citizens living in the vicinity of this stronghold.

Godou was perfectly capable of drawing on this power from the populace using psychic sensing.

Unlike arrows, there was no issue of "running out of ammunition." Perhaps the battle had actually swung in his favor now—

Just as Godou was about to invoke the [Goat], he suddenly felt dizzy.

"The... heck...?"

His feet tangled together. Godou was filled with nausea and even his entire body felt cold.

He was quite shocked by this first experience.

"Did it finally take effect? Only befitting of my kin to display such resilience."

Uldin smiled wryly as he gazed down at Godou from atop the castle walls.

"Ordinary poisons have no effect on us, but this substance, prepared from the distant orient and delivered here—specially made to cause even a godslayer to faint—has finally exerted its effects."

Poison!? Impossible, Godou thought. Although there was that time when Liliana drugged him in the past, but a Campione's ridiculously tough body possessed considerable resistance to poisons.

When the heck did he eat anything like that?

Godou had been carefully paying attention to his food during his stay in Uldin's castle and did not notice eating anything poisoned...

Could it be—Godou realized something and was suddenly shocked.

Uldin smiled with delight and took out an arrow from his quiver.

Just as imagined, there was a viscous, transparent liquid dripping down from the arrowhead.

Godou was struck in the shoulder by one of these arrows just now. Speaking of which, applying poison onto arrows for shooting people and animals was apparently one of the tactics that equestrian tribes were skilled in.

According to history, the warriors at Kamakura city had suffered much from them during the invasion of the Mongolians' Yuan dynasty.

Strength was gradually sapped from Godou's body.

Slowly, he toppled forwards and fell on one knee.

"Hohohoho. It's not very sporting, but it looks like this battle is about to conclude with my victory."

Uldin drew his bow and shot an arrow.

Further poisoning would probably decide the victor then and there.

Using all four limbs like a wolf, Godou mustered all his strength to jump right.

He managed to evade, barely. Then the second and third arrows sliced through the wind. Despite Godou's four-legged stance, dodging the second arrow precariously—He could not escape the third.

The arrow embedded itself in his left calf.

"Guah!"

A pang of sharp pain. The arrow went deep into his calf.

Now that his leg was injured, Godou could no longer dodge in the same manner as before. Very soon, the poison should be taking effect. But luckily, the arrow had not struck any major arteries or anything critical.

In other words, Godou still had enough remaining strength to make a bid for final victory—

Thanks to that, he was prepared to take a gamble, no holds barred.

Godou intended to pour all of his remaining power into the [Goat]. Enduring the pain in his leg, the nausea and the chills, he forced himself to stand up by relying on willpower alone.

Watching Godou from above, Uldin unexpectedly threw his bow away.

The Huns' long-range weapon made a clatter as it rolled down the side of the castle walls.

"Even forced into a corner as a wounded beast, you still aim for a chance to counterattack. As my fellow kin, you are surely capable of that. You are really quite a delightful fellow!"

Uldin smiled as he gazed down at Godou.

Up until now, the smiles he displayed had all been all cheerful and full of positive fighting spirit. But currently, this smile was filled with savagery. It was the smile of a hunter determined to slay his prey.

Uldin was also planning to make a bid for final victory.

Feeling like he was facing himself, Godou clicked his tongue. As expected of his fellow kin.

Even faced with overwhelming odds—Or rather, precisely because of that, he must summon his full power to defeat the enemy!

"Come to my side, the sword of victory!"

The Hunnic godslayer shouted spell words.

"So long as you exist in this very hand, I shall obtain victory in any and every battlefield. So long as you exist in this very hand, my army is rendered immortal and invincible!"

Having forsaken the bow, Uldin raised his empty right hand towards the sky.

A longsword suddenly manifested in his hand.

The slender blade of steel measured roughly 80cm or so. The hilt was modest and completely unadorned. However, accompanying the manifestation of this longsword, symbols began to descend from the sky.

Norse runes. Symbols looking like "↑", shaped like upward pointing arrows.

Countless symbols of this form descended from the sky like snow.

Thanks to the knowledge imparted by Erica and Ena, Godou understood the meaning of this rune. It was the rune symbolizing the Norse war god of victory and battle.

"So this is the power of that god called Tyr!?"

"That Ruska girl, I can't believe she even disclosed my trump card."

Uldin smiled wryly for an instant in response to Godou's mutterings. However, he immediately resumed his solemn countenance and raised the sword in his right hand high up in the air.

"O Tyr's Sword, grant to my army immortality and victory!"

Hearing this command, the numerous corpses stood up all at once.

As the unending stream of Tyr's runes descended upon their bodies, the mini-pterosaurs that were previously wiped out all opened their eyes, struggled to their feet and spread their wings.

Even the injuries suffered back when they were struck down by the [Boar]'s shockwaves were completely healed.

—The war god Tyr was also a god with the [Steel] attribute. As one from the lineage of steel, that implied properties of immortal indestructibility.

Godou recalled his formidable foe, Lancelot du Lac.

This authority was similar to what the goddess possessed. In this case, immortality manifested in the form of resurrecting one's own army!

Furthermore, not only the mini-pterosaurs but also the giant red dragon the [Boar] had defeated were appearing in the air once more.

"Guh! O guardian of the righteous, I offer sacrifice and invite you!"

Godou immediately invoked the [Goat] incarnation.

Gathering the feelings of the populace, this incarnation controlled lightning and possessed "priestly" powers.

Godou expanded the range of psychic sensing—releasing it towards Augusta Raurica, intending to gather the willpower of the populace that feared Uldin. However, he did not succeed.

Before his sensing powers could explode in range, one of the mini-pterosaurs was already attacking him.

Godou pointed his right hand towards the throat of the viciously pouncing pterosaur.

The lightning from his palm struck the mini-pterosaur dead. Although the potency was much less compared to when he gathered power from the majority of the populace, it was enough to handle enemies of this level.

Nevertheless, Godou was instantly surrounded despite defeating the first beast.

He was surrounded by the resurrected mini-pterosaur army of roughly a hundred.

Furthermore, circling in the air was the giant red dragon whose gaze was directed towards Godou on the ground. More importantly, Uldin was still standing on top of the castle walls.

Stabbing Tyr's Sword into the pathway, he picked up the bow he had tossed away just now.

There was an absolute disadvantage in numbers. Although the [Goat]'s lightning was quite powerful, it did not have the explosive force to clear out the encircling enemies in one clean sweep. An attack like the [White Stallion] was required to achieve that sort of effect.

Furthermore, the number of divine beasts increased further by one.

A *Deinonychus* was running towards him, opposite to where he was facing. It was the one that had gone chasing after Ena just now .

Godou began to tremble, feeling as though his heart was clutched by a grim reaper's hand. Was the Hime-Miko killed already? —Just as he experienced this fear.

Then at this very moment—

The ice-cold sensation of steel returned to his right arm.

'Your Majesty! Ena and Erica-san are fine. So go on and use it!'

Returned to Godou's right arm, the partner transmitted the Hime-Miko's message to him.

Godou smiled involuntarily. He felt relieved. Thank goodness.

With that, he could continue fighting! This involuntary smile was filled with savagery that only Uldin could rival.

"Ama no Murakumo! Prepare a dragon for me!"

The instant Godou issued this order, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi manifested in his right hand.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi possessed the power to " replicate an enemy's divine powers and authority." This time, Godou commanded it to simulate Uldin's [Dragon Taming] ability.

Released from Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, the divine power called out to an approaching pterosaur.

This was the one Uldin had been riding, the *Deinonychus* that was chasing Ena earlier.

Regrettably, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's copying powers could only control one beast apparently. Godou forced his feeble body to move once more. As fast as possible, he had to reach the dragon's saddle.

"What!?"

Uldin was stunned. This was only natural.

The pterosaur he had summoned for his own support had now gone over to Godou and even allowed the enemy that should be defeated to ride it and take flight. However—

"I am utterly impressed. This doesn't really matter to me, but you really are a resilient fellow! Chase after him!"

Uldin immediately smiled with joy and calmly issued orders for pursuit.

The army of mini-pterosaurs took flight one after another to pursue Godou who was flying through the night sky.

As expected of the ancient Campione, Uldin also seemed to understand quite well that godslayers were precisely the kinds of creatures whose dormant potential exploded only in response to minuscule chances of victory.

Part 5

Thus, Godou was currently fleeing with an army of mini-pterosaurs in pursuit.

Their flight speeds were apparently comparable, hence Godou was able to maintain the lead from his head start.

Since he had no destination, Godou simply ordered the pterosaur to fly horizontally in the moon's direction.

The crescent moon was shining with pristine, white radiance. Speaking of which, Madame Aisha's corridor was (probably) going to open when the full moon came—?

Riding on the dragon saddle, Godou found the experience unexpectedly similar to horse riding.

In other words, "it's not bad once you get used to it." Poisoned and having an arrow through his leg, Godou found it quite painful to force this kind of body to ride the pterosaur.

His entire body was exhausted. Even fueled by willpower, he was unable to move freely.

If his consciousness started to get hazy, not only would he lose grip of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, but he would also fall off the dragon saddle. In that case, things would be over if he finally fell from a height of two or three hundred meters.

—Suddenly, he noticed the mini-pterosaurs were gaining on him from behind.

Godou squeezed out more power to raise his pterosaur's speed. Releasing the [Goat]'s lightning, he struck down one of the pursuing pterosaurs. An instant kill.

But it was no time to celebrate. The enemies were still quite numerous.

Furthermore, he did not know if Tyr's authority could resurrect them repeatedly.

Even if he continued to rely on the [Goat]'s powers to fight, he would still gradually get cornered. If the battle continued to drag on, Kusanagi Godou would surely deplete all his energy in the middle—

Currently, what he needed was a decisive power that could end the battle in one strike.

The [White Stallion] was already used. However, there was still hope.

Still, Godou was not confident he could control it well. Fortunately, this was in the air and there were no settlements or companions in the surroundings.

If he were to use the power that Yuri had prepared specifically in premonition of this crisis, now was the only time.

"Dawn's secret archives huh..."

As Godou chanted spell words, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi began to burn with black flames.

"Lend unto me the skills of the witch... goddess!"

Before coming to ancient Gaul, Yuri had released this sealed power.

These were the "spell words" left behind not too long ago as the dawn goddess Circe's legacy. These spell words were far too simple to be called an authority. By chanting this incantation, Kusanagi Godou was granted for a short duration the witch goddess' divine power of magical control—

This could be described as an impromptu grimoire, a guide for controlling a goddess' powers.

Using this power, Kusanagi Godou was able to draw out the [Sword of the Beginning and the End], despite not being a goddess himself, to obtain the power of heaven and earth's creation!

"Those that summon storms... A thousand dragons, a thousand snakes. Gather now to become a blade!"

Godou finally used it a second time.

Relying on the gift left behind by Athena together with the power painstakingly bestowed by Circe, Godou finally managed to master the ritual of destruction and rebirth. Those involved in the world of magic, not knowing any better, would probably mistaken this as "Kusanagi Godou's third authority."

The small star of darkness manifested over the crescent moon.

This stellar object immediately expanded and instantly grew to a diameter of dozens of meters.

Then it began to rotate. Spinning horizontally, it was slow at first but high-speed revolution instantly resulted. *Gwoon*. *Gwoon*. The rotating black star gave off its distinctive noise.

Wielded in Godou's right hand, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was completely shrouded in black flames whose temperature could not be felt.

'Let's go, king! Hereby execute the ritual of heaven and earth's creation. Now is the time to summon the storm!'

These were Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's thoughts.

Despite possessing self-awareness, the divine sword seldom spoke. Only in battle—and during critical moments like this did it make an exception.

Just as Godou nodded to acknowledge his partner's words, the storm was produced.

From overhead, the storm was blowing due to the star of darkness.

Rather than blowing outwards, these strong winds flowed to suck things in. The raging winds swirled in the dark star's surroundings, forming a cyclone, resulting in a storm.

Chasing after Godou, the army of mini-pterosaurs were sucked towards the star of darkness like particles of dust.

Even as the mini-pterosaurs desperately resisted by flapping their wings, it was futile.

"This is getting out of hand..."

Godou could not help but mutter to himself.

Beneath his flying pterosaur was a vast plain belonging to ancient Gaul. Green pastures stretched all the way to the horizon. Apart from scattered beech and oak trees, the terrain was virtually flat.

However, the landscape of this plain was now changing.

The star of darkness not only sucked in the pterosaur army but also the atmosphere of the night sky, the grass, the trees, the flowers and the soil.

Accompanied by the howling of the wind, a large amount of soil and dirt flew into the air.

Naturally, a massive hole was being dug out of the ground. At first ten-odd meters in diameter, the hole was gradually expanding , almost large enough to be called a crater.

If this was happening in the modern world, who knew how much damage would be caused—?

Furthermore, a tragic fate awaited all the mini-pterosaurs, caught in this gravitational storm.

As if mocking them, the star of darkness mercilessly pulled in the mini-pterosaurs despite their struggles, wiping out the pterosaur army from the night sky with exceptional speed.

Completely erased. There was no worry of whether Tyr's Sword could resurrect them anymore.

On the other hand, Godou and his dragon mount barely managed to resist the wind drawing them in.

'O king, time to use more power! Or else we too shall be sucked into it!'

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi warned. Godou instantly poured magical power into the divine sword. Don't suck us in as well—He shouted strongly in his thoughts.

Thanks to that, the storm blowing around the star of darkness just managed to miss Godou and his mount.

However, every time the raging wind blew past them, the pterosaur would still shake very unsteadily, almost losing balance.

It would not be surprising for the rider, Godou, to fall off at any moment.

"Guh—I'm almost at my limit huh..."

The spitting headache caused Godou to frown.

His control over the dark star and the raging storm was reaching a limit. Although Circe's power was assisting him, this was still too difficult for Godou who had yet to get used to controlling it.

Even something as simple as a sigh of relief would probably make him lose control. Furthermore—

"Hahahaha! This man here, I can't believe you were hiding such a trump card!"

Still in good shape, the enemy was laughing with exhilaration.

Uldin was riding astride a pterosaur, flying in pursuit of Godou .

There was also another pterosaur following behind him. He had apparently "disassembled" the giant red dragon to release the two dinosaurs from the union. Presumably, the massive body was harder to ride.

Uldin was mounted on the boundary between the pterosaur's head and shoulders as though he were riding a horse.

Using his legs to grip the pterosaur's body, he maintained his balance in a skillful posture. Furthermore, he was still carrying Tyr's Sword in his hand.

"Ending the battle with a dragon race sounds like a fun idea, comrade!"

The second pterosaur behind the Hunnic godslayer was also sucked into the star of darkness.

However, Uldin's pterosaur barely managed to stay safe, because the rider had poured almost all of his magical power into the pterosaur, thereby strengthening its flying ability.

Uldin was already the [Dragon Tamer], hence being able to strengthen his dragon mount was only to be expected.

On Godou's side, he had no choice but to strengthen his own dragon mount and prepare to strike back.

However, both his body and mind were reaching their limits—

Brandishing the sword of victory, Uldin flew towards Godou whose stamina and magical power were almost completely depleted. Their distance began to shrink slowly.

Once the enemy caught up close enough to attack with his sword, it would be Godou's defeat.

Godou did not have any strength to spare for evasion. Neither could he release the [Goat]'s lightning. In exchange for flying to this location, the price he paid was that he could no longer locate Erica, Ena or Augusta Raurica's twenty thousand citizens. Consequently, he was unable to gather power from them.

If he made use of psychic sensing, perhaps he would be able to locate them. But Godou really did not have the leisure to do so.

Hence—This could be described as literally "checkmate."

Even so, Godou could still struggle desperately, simply powered by a mental state of "I'm not gonna lose to you", consequences be damned, as well as the strength provided by companions who could not possibly exist here.

'Kusanagi Godou!'

'Godou-san. Almost there!'

These were the voices of girls who were not supposed to be present.

The thoughts of Liliana Kranjcar and Mariya Yuri. Using the [Goat]'s psychic sensing to hear these voices, Godou felt intrigued. However, these voices were definitely quite nearby.

Were they watching him through some sort of means...?

Nevertheless, Godou immediately tossed these incomprehensible queries aside for now.

This was because he noticed he had received power from Liliana and Yuri who were not supposed to be here—life force and magical power. It was not very much, but with this, it was now possible!

"There... How's that!?"

With his companions' help, Godou converted the total remainder of his magical power into lightning and released it from his left hand.

A direct hit on Uldin's dragon mount. At this moment, the Hunnic godslayer had just circled to above Godou's left and was just about to slash with Tyr's Sword.

GAAAAAAAAAAAH!

Struck in the face by lightning, the pterosaur screamed. Then captured by the dark star's gravity, it was finally pulled over.

"It's not over yet!"

Unbelievably, Uldin jumped over from the pterosaur's back—

He had taken a leap, aiming for the dragon saddle on Godou's pterosaur.

Along the way, he threw away Tyr's Sword and drew a hatchet from his belt instead. On top of a saddle—in a fight at such close quarters, a small weapon as easily swung as a knife was more advantageous.

Hence, he substituted a hatchet for his sword. As expected of a guy accustomed to real combat.

Oh well, since Godou had immediately returned Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi to within his right arm and desperately grabbed the wrist of Uldin's hatchet-wielding hand, he was not that different from his enemy after all...

That said, Uldin held the absolute advantage in physical strength.

For the sake of victory, Godou chose a final taboo method without any hesitation. Silently ordering the star of darkness overhead to "disappear as quickly as possible," he commanded the pterosaur at the same time:

"Descend like this! Fly towards the ground!"

"What!?"

In the moment of Uldin's surprise, the pterosaur began its rapid descent.

With the disappearance of the star of darkness, the force of attraction vanished accordingly. Hence, there was no longer anything to hinder the pterosaur's flight.

In this manner, the pterosaur flew its hardest towards the empty plain, finally crashing violently.

Naturally, this resulted in Godou and Uldin's crash landing together as well.

Epilogue

"It is not working. I cannot see anymore..."

Liliana Kranjcar's shoulders shook in regret as she opened her eyes.

"And to think I finally found Kusanagi Godou after so much trouble—!"

"This cannot be helped. The other side of the corridor indeed leads somewhere not of this world. Hence, we should already be happy to have caught a slight glimpse for a brief while."

Mariya Yuri gently comforted her companion who was biting her lip tightly in self-remonstration.

Quietly, she placed her hand on Liliana's shoulder. Calming down a little as a result, Liliana nodded.

"Fair enough. Using my magic and your power, Mariya Yuri, we were able to explore the situation on the other side. I suppose finding this out is already an accomplishment."

"Yes. Now the rescue mission officially begins!"

Yuri spoke with resolve as though to encourage not only her companion but also herself.

Seeing Yuri acting a little affectatiously, Liliana could not help but smile wryly. Feeling a little embarrassed, the Hime-Miko also smiled slightly wryly.

The two girls were currently in the mountains of a place called Casentino, located in the region of Tuscany.

They were following a stream at the bottom of a ravine. This was the place where the quartet had disappeared. Namely, the four people: Salvatore Doni, Kusanagi Godou, Erica Blandelli and Seishuuin Ena.

Yuri and Liliana were standing by the cliffs.

In other words, this was where the "corridor" had appeared—the darkness resembling a cave when triggered by the authority that caused magic to go berserk.

Using spirit vision to find out that the distant endpoint of this passageway led to "this world on the other side," Yuri was apparently able to use psychic sensing to share what she had seen with her companion.

Hence, Liliana had used witchcraft for locating people and flown the [Witch's Eye] towards the direction indicated.

This resulted in the discovery of "their companions fighting a dragon-riding young man" at a castle somewhere.

Using psychic sensing to share their sight, Yuri and Liliana were both quite happy for this result.

Since they needed to help Kusanagi Godou, the two of them transmitted their "power" through the corridor.

However, before they could make contact with him, the [Witch's Eye] and psychic sensing were both dispelled. Using magic on the other side was no easy task after all.

Liliana sighed deeply.

"That said, I never expected he would be able to draw out the ' black blade' for battle."

"Just to be on the safe side, I unsealed it beforehand. However, that person who resembles Godou-san so much, what on earth are his origins...?"

"Would it be correct to recognize him as the eighth Campione...? "

Liliana turned to face Yuri who was clasping her hands together in doubt.

There were too many incomprehensible aspects to this "corridor created by Madame Aisha." Due to too many things happening and rushing about hastily, they had not been able to listen to a proper explanation from Saint Raffaello.

"Speaking of which, having only entered this cave no longer than three hours... Yet Godou-san appears to have embroiled himself in a conflict again."

"And finally, it looked like he was forced to make an emergency crash landing. Oh well."

"L-Liliana-san. Please do not say anything like "he probably survived." Although Godou-san is human, even if something were to happen to him, he will surely be fine!"

"In other words, Mariya Yuri, you and I are in perfect agreement."

In any case, Yuri and Liliana began to shift their thoughts from " confirming the safety of their companions" to considering "how to rescue them."

"Wow, I almost thought I was going to die back then."

Godslayer Uldin laughed heartily as he spoke.

Holding the reins, Ena was sitting cross-legged on the cargo section of a cart drawn by two horses. Godou was sitting opposite her and frowning at Uldin's statement that no normal human would make.

As a side note, Erica was currently riding her horse in a trot beside the cart.

"How unbelievable that they could survive that..."

"Yes. His Majesty and Uldin-san are truly absurd people..."

Rather than amazement, Erica and Ena's words were filled with a different sort of overtone.

The two Devil Kings had crash landed several hours earlier.

Crashing down in the plain somewhere, the pterosaur had slid along the ground like a aeroplane. After that, the Campiones were tossed off with countless cuts and bruises as well as broken bones all over their bodies.

Unable to stand up, the pair had fainted temporarily. But they did manage to survive. After Erica and Ena caught up to them, they were rescued.

"Hey comrade, let me offer another invitation. Will you be king in my place?"

While rocking from the motions of the cart, Uldin suddenly proposed.

Although Godou was in the same state, the other guy seemed to have completely recovered his energy.

"How about we build our harems in Rome or over in Constantinople? I think it would be a great idea."

"Like I said, stop talking about that. I already told you before our duel."

In response to Godou's displeased grumbles, Uldin replied with surprise.

"Hey hey. I thought that was a promise only if I lost."

"What nonsense are you talking about? You clearly couldn't fight anymore. And I'm the one who put you in that state."

"But going with that logic, you couldn't fight anymore either, comrade."

"I-I was fine. I deliberately made myself like that."

"No no, don't forget that before the crash, I was the one who thrashed you soundly."

The two Campiones were going at each in the spirit of "an eye for an eye."

While this meaningless dispute was going on, the cart returned to the stronghold at Augusta Raurica.

Ruska and Clotilde were scheduled to arrive later. Fortunately, the Roman army had not returned, thus avoiding an encounter with Uldin.

Since Aisha was with the people of the Roman army, she was probably not here either.

Just as Erica and Ena stopped their horse and cart respectively before the castle gates—

"What's going on? He looks like he's in a great hurry."

"A Roman courier. He probably has urgent news to report to Lugdunum."

Ena looked out towards the main road ahead and murmured. Staring in the same direction, Uldin also commented.

Apparently, a Hun's eyesight rivaled that of a Japanese child of nature.

"Lugdunum?"

"In modern parlance, that's Lyon in France. During this era, it was an important stronghold in the Roman province of Gaul."

Seeing Godou confused, Erica clarified.

The city of Lyon in southern France. Godou had heard of it before but never visited the city. Soon after, the Roman cavalryman could be seen approaching.

This was almost a full gallop. Continuing to ride in this manner would cause the horse to collapse soon.

"Judging from the way he's making a beeline for here, he intends to switch horses?"

"Yeah. Maintaining speed by switching horses multiple times."

Realizing how Uldin discerned the rider was a courier, Godou nodded.

On the other hand, Erica blocked the road as if sealing it off, walking towards the cavalryman whose horse was decelerating.

"I belong to the army stationed here. What's the urgent news?"

"E-Enemies gathering up north... The Frankish tribes have pledged themselves under a certain man's banner to form a great alliance!"

The courier was initially surprised to hear Erica declare herself part of the army despite being a woman.

But perhaps due to the urgency of the situation, he reported as he panted heavily. Not only the horse but even the rider was also exhausted. It really must be quite an emergency.

"Who is this man you speak of?"

"His name is Salvatore Doni... Although it's unknown where he hails from, that man... No, that monster single-handedly conquered the stronghold of Colonia Agrippina... Uwooh!"

It must have been quite a regretful affair, seeing as the young courier cried tears of chagrin.

However, Godou and his group had no leisure to notice such details.

"S-Salvatore?"

"Looks like the situation has gradually gotten serious..."

"So that king has already arrived. And even caused all sorts of serious incidents."

The three moderners were respectively dumbstruck, worried and lamenting.

Furthermore, even Uldin reacted with "that reminds me."

"I've heard of that name too. It was the godslayer wandering my forest three months ago."

"W-What did you say?"

"After I told him that this area was my 'hunting grounds,' he said he was going to tour the north and have some fun first. He also said something about wanting to duel me after he gets used to these lands."

Uldin recalled with an amused expression the maniacal words that sounded very much like a certain man.

He did not seem like he intended to refuse the challenge. Speaking of which, to think it was 'three months ago.' Godou could not help but click his tongue.

Clearly Doni was sent to a time much earlier than them.

How many unruly acts exactly had he committed during this time?

"Hey. Those Frankish tribes working under Doni are..."

"I remember they were the founders of France?"

"Yes. Of Germanic lineage, the Franks were united by Clovis I to establish the dominance of the Merovingian dynasty, thereby starting the history of France. However, that's not supposed to happen until a hundred years from now, you know?"

The moderners gathered together and whispered to each other.

Hearing Erica describe future events, Ena sighed uncharacteristically.

"So, this could cause history to change too. So we really should hope for that whatever corrective force to work its effects...?"

"About this matter, is it really okay to hope?"

As Erica remarked in distress, Ena was shocked all of a sudden.

"But didn't Aisha-san already explain about this kind of force?"

"Ultimately, Madame Aisha is just a traveler. No matter how many years she spent traveling in the world of the past, she would still eventually return to the modern age. But if a modern Campione were to live in this world persistently for decades or even centuries... Do you think that kind of continued distortion can be corrected?"

Erica murmured with a gloomy voice and sighed.

"I think that it won't come as a surprise if Sir Salvatore were to forget about 'returning to the present' and end up living here for more than a century."

"Considering that idiot, that's very possible for sure."

Godou could not help but nod, realizing that new trials were about to begin.

Clearly it was imperative to find Doni and bring him back even if it meant tying him up. This could very well turn into a problem no less troublesome than a duel with Uldin.

Afterword

Hello everyone, it's been a while. *Campione!* finally reaches its 14th volume.

I express my utmost thanks to the loving support from each and every one of you, readers. Due to the anime last year, I was constantly chased after for *Campione!* related drafts and various assorted affairs for a whole year.

There were good things like being featured on Weekly Shounen Jump a number of times and being invited to Taiwan, all sorts of troublesome things that I cannot write about here. Every single day was spent in a hectic bustle.

One incident left a particularly deep impression on me. A certain male-oriented fashion magazine almost mistook me for a Cthulu writer. (wry smile)

This was during an interview for a light novel feature when a reporter and interviewer who claimed "I've read *Campione!*" asked me: "This series uses the Cthulu mythos as its theme—" Nothing of that sort, man! (sweat drops)

Looks like the guy must have learnt the word "Cthulu" from recent anime.

Based on various clues I gathered throughout the interview, it seems like someone jumped to the conclusion that 'stories about gods, ahhh, that's basically the Cthulu mythos.'

Before the anime was broadcast, this type of situation also happened when I was busiest in writing Volume 13. Back then, I kept thinking to myself, just let it be since they should probably realize the mistake before the report is published—

In the end, "Cthulu" was written clearly on the first draft they delivered to me. (wry smile)

Back then, I said "this interview is 90% fabricated in my view, don't believe it" and gave up on reading it, then relying on the hard work of Super Dash Bunko's editorial department, the notion of "Takedzuki Jou = Cthulu writer" was eradicated.

Like manga artists who frequently do the same in their manga and tankouban afterwords, I kept a record of these happenings in the hopes of revealing them one day.

Oh dear, by this point, all I can do is treat it all as a joke. (laugh)

Well then, this volume's story is based on an early idea I considered of "The Devil King one should stay the most away from (World Classics Drama Series) and what if a certain protagonist were born in the Middle Ages or earlier."

Then there is the "little story in mid-January" that was mentioned in Chapter 2. If any of you would like to read this story, readers, please check out the limited edition booklet that comes as a gift with buying Volume 14 and manga Volume 2 at the same time, or the Drama CD included in the previous magazine. (Publisher's note: all sold out already)

In the next volume after this, expect a super Campione battle transcending time and space.

カンピオーネ⑭
よろしく
お願いします♪

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Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **Hassou-no-kamae**(八): one of the five stances of kendo, an offensive posture with the sword pointing upright and the blade sloping slightly to the rear.[1]
2. ↑ **Tempering**: Refers to the final process in making chocolate when cocoa butter crystallizes. Uncontrolled crystallization results in undesirable texture and appearance.[2]
3. ↑ **White Day**: March 14, the day one month after Valentine's Day. In Japan, it is customary for girls to give boys chocolate on Valentine's Day. On White Day, boys are expected to return the favor with a gift, generally double or triple the value of the Valentine's gift.[3]
4. ↑ **Dionysus**: known as Bacchus in Roman mythology, Dionysus was the Greek god of the grape harvest, wine and winemaking, ritual madness and ecstasy.[4]
5. ↑ **Uldin**: historically, Uldin was a primary chieftain of the Huns starting from 390 CE and ruled over the western wing of the Hunnic state. The Huns split into three large groups after Uldin's death in 412.[5]
6. ↑ **Tyr**: a Norse god associated with law and heroic glory, one of his most striking characteristics is the hand he lost to Fenrir during the binding of the monstrous wolf. Tyr is speculated to have been the father of the gods and chief deity until he was overtaken in popularity and authority by Odin and Thor.[6]
7. ↑ **Furius**: probably a member of the *gens Furia*, one of the most ancient and noble patrician houses at Rome.[7]
8. ↑ **Flavius**: Flavius Honorius Augustus was the Western Roman Emperor from 395 to 423 CE.[8]

9. ↑ **Tír na nÓg**: the "Land of the Young" widely known as the Otherworld in Irish mythology. It is the place where Tuatha Dé Danann settled when they left Ireland's surface. Rather than an afterlife for heroes as popularly misconceived, it is an earthly paradise populated by supernatural beings that sailors and adventurers may chance upon through good fortune.[9]
10. ↑ **Rudra**: a Rigvedic deity, associated with wind or storm, and the hunt. Rudra is also taken as a synonym of Shiva. Shiva is often depicted with a third eye, with which he used to burn Desire to ashes. Symbolizing the Sun, Moon and Fire, the three eyes are also known collectively as the three mother goddesses.[10][11]
11. ↑ **Samarkand**: the 2nd-largest city in Uzbekistan and noted for its central location along the Silk Road.[12]
12. ↑ **Chang'an**: an ancient Chinese city, used as the capital by more than ten dynasties.[13]
13. ↑ **Samson**: a judge of the ancient Israelites, recorded in the Book of Judges. God granted Samson supernatural strength to fight Israel's enemies and perform heroic feats. However, he had two fatal weaknesses: his attraction to untrustworthy women and his hair which made him powerless when cut.[14]
14. ↑ **Sword of the War God**: the legendary weapon carried by Attila the Hun. The Roman historian Jordanes reported that Attila possessed the "Holy War Sword of the Scythians," which was given to him by Mars and made him a "prince of the entire world." The Roman god Mars was definitely an embellishment on Jordanes' part; the Huns would have simply called it the sword of God. In any case, Tyr was

equated with Mars when Germanic peoples identified Roman gods with their Germanic deities.[15]

15. ↑ **Delilah**: the temptress who persuaded the biblical hero Samson to reveal his weakness (his hair must not be cut). While Samson was sleeping, she ordered a servant to shave his head, thereby eliminating his supernatural strength and allowing the Philistines to capture and blind him.[16]
16. ↑ Joshua 6:13,16
17. ↑ **Hassou-no-kamae**(八): one of the five stances of kendo, an offensive posture with the sword pointing upright and the blade sloping slightly to the rear.[17]
18. ↑ Joshua 6:26
19. ↑ Joshua 6:26